A WIFE'S STORY,

AND

OTHER TALES.

VOL. III.

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AND

OTHER TALES.

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"CASTE," "SAFELY MARRIED,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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DAISY'S TRIALS.

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CHAPTER I.

"MY own child; yes, nurse, that's true; but no truer than that it's his child. His son! And I tell you, nurse, there are times when it wouldn't be safe for me to be alone with it; if a look of him should come into its eyes I might kill it for hate, and for fear!"

She was only answered by a sigh.

They were sitting in the farm-house kitchen —the kitchen of Moor-Edge, or, as it is more commonly called, Murridge Farm-house. A grey, substantially-built, many-gabled house, with heavy stone mouldings

above mullioned and diamond-paned lattices, and with an ample stone porch. One end of the house is covered by a century-old pear-tree. In front it has a patch of smooth fine turf traversed by flagged paths, walled in by a low and broad-topped wall. In the afternoon the shadows of the wind-blown orchard trees stretch half across this green: in a corner to which those shadows never reach, stand a group of ash-trees. When the sun shines, the aspect of the place is cheery, its greys are warm, and its greens full of a suppressed glow; but in Winter, and in dead, dull weather, it looks austere and gloomy. A vast common stretches northward behind the farm. From the little-used front gate a steep and rough footway, that in Winter time is often nothing but an impetuous watercourse, precipitates itself towards the far-below lying plain.

They were sitting close to the lattice, and the July moon was just lifting itself slowly to shine on them through the ash-trees. The

casement stood wide open, and let in an evening air that was full of perfumes: from the sunburnt woodbine that was hanging round the porch, from a group of sunburnt lilies beneath the window which would now bleach again in the moolight, and from late-lying sunburnt hay on a sloping meadow out of sight.

The woman who had spoken had a face which, in that mysterious mingling of twilight and of moonlight, looked softly girlish. She was dressed in lustreless black. The other, whom she had called "nurse," who had answered her only with a sigh, was middle-aged, and comely, and sad-eyed. She, too, wore black; she sat in an old-fashioned cushioned chair, and rocked in her arms a scarcely three-months old child.

There was a long silence, broken only by occasional noises from the farm-yard, by the rustling of leaves, and the tranquil breathing of the sleeping child.

The moon had climbed a good way above

the ash-trees, tinting the clear sky a rose-tinged lilac, before either of them spoke. Then it was the older woman, with tender deference, and, at the same time, with the sort of caution one unconsciously uses towards the mentally sick; feeling the way, to find how much can be ventured, how much can be borne.

"All this day you've been thinking, and it's not much else, indeed, that I've done; thinking about the letter. May I tell you my mind, my dearie, before you tell me yours?"

As if aware that the silence had been broken without being aware what had been said, the other answered, not what was now said, but something she had let pass unanswered long before.

"But for it," with a gesture towards the child, "I never should wish to leave you. There would be no reason why I should ever leave you. I would stay here always, till I die. If it hadn't lived, as I hoped it

mightn't, or if you'd sent it away, as I thought you would, somewhere where I need never have seen it, nor heard of it again, then, oh so thankfully, I'd have stayed here always. But it did live, and you say you can't send it away; you say it comforts you for the loss of your own, so, as it must stay, I must go."

"Comforts me! Ay, indeed does it! And it would comfort you, as nothing else in this world ever can, if only you'd not not harden your heart against it."

With no notice of this interruption, beyond a slight shiver of disgust, the girl went on:

"So, as I must go, as I can't stay here always, as I can't hide myself here, out of the world, till I die, I'll try and lose myself in the world. I'll separate myself from you, though you're the only creature I love, and that loves me; I'll go to some strange place with this strange woman; I'll try and forget you, with all else that belongs to the past. I'll

strip off my wedding-ring and my widow's mourning, and try to strip off the memory of what they stand for; I'll deny, even to myself, that I've worn either. Widow's mourning! as if I could mourn for him! No, but I mourn for myself, for my life that he soiled and spoiled, so that for me there's neither memory nor hope: the very air I breathe is poisoned. It seems to smell sweet to-night," she said, lifting her face and looking out. "To you it does smell sweet, nurse, doesn't it? But to me there's still the smell of blood in it, the sickening smell of blood!"

The other, sorrowfully noticing the growing excitement of voice and the wandering wildness of eye, only sighed out:

"It's terrible to hate the dead."

"Let me forget, then, and I shall leave off hating."

"It may be God's will that you should remember and forgive."

"Forgive!" she echoed.

Another pause, and then the girl spoke again:

"If I put all my heart, and soul, and strength into one prayer—to be able to forget—I can't think but God will hear me. It isn't much I ask, to forget, only to forget, yet it's all I ask. Though I'm young still, I don't ask joy or hope, but only to forget."

"There's one thing you can't forget. One thing you can't strip off you, or tear out of you, or bury away from you. There's no stone heavy enough to keep it down. It's the mother's heart that's in you, and that, one day, will stir and wake. If, one day, you marry again, and bear other children——"

"Marry again!—bear other children! Never! I will never own that child, or my hateful marriage. These unowned things will stand always between me and love. Love! What do I want with love?—what have I to do with love? I want only peace—peace and to forget."

"You feel like that now, but, as you say, dearie, you're young; you may have long to live; it's dreary to live always alone. If only you'd not take a lie upon you. Ah! Miss Daisy"—the once familiar name, in her earnestness, slipped out unawares,—"don't do it, don't do it. There was one, as once loved you, I always believe will never rest till he finds you!"

"You're mad, nurse!—you're mad! Do you think I'd feel myself fit for him, ever, on this side the grave? As for my being young—I am not young. I can never be young any more. When I see myself in the glass, I wonder that my hair isn't white, that my flesh isn't shrivelled, that my eyes are not dim, that my face doesn't tell of the horrible things it has looked upon."

"But it's not so—men will see it's not so—in time you'll come to feel it's not so. Some Spring the blood will dance in your veins, and the world will seem beautiful; and you'll feel that, cost what it may, you

must love and be happy before you die. And what's to hinder? If only you'll be patient till this madness of misery is past, and not take a lie upon you. What but pity could any good man feel for——"

"It's what *I* feel about myself that would hinder," the girl broke in. "But it's no use talking. My mind is made up; I shall go to her."

"I wish no better than that you should go to her, dearie; but as what you are, not with a lie upon you. Leave the child with me yet awhile, as is needful for it, and best for you; but go to her as a widow and a mother."

"I will not. She knows nothing of me but my maiden name—the only name I will ever own. She is alone, and she is dying; because she loved my mother she sends for me, begging me to be with her till she dies. I shall go to her. She promises to leave me all she has. I shall be rich again. It shall all be for you, nurse.

I shall ask nothing of you but to keep that child always, letting it grow up as your own."

"You call evil days upon yourself when you take a lie upon you. If anything I could say could turn your heart from doing it, God put it in my heart to say that thing!"

"Evil days!" she echoed, with a wild little laugh. "What evil can seem to me evil any more?—what bitterness bitter?"

"And it's all vain trying," the older woman went on; "you can't forget your child. The mother's heart is in you. Sooner or later it will waken. It will trouble you when you think you've found peace. My dearie, my dearie, better than you know yourself I know you."

"The Scripture says a woman can forget her child. If any woman, surely I, to whom the father of that child was hateful."

"It won't be so. Better than you know yourself, indeed, I know you. The tender

heart that was like a mother's to the baby-brother won't remain dead and cold to its own flesh and blood."

"Oh, my brother! Oh, Wattie, Wattie, Wattie! All the rest I could, perhaps, have forgiven him, but not your death." She broke now into passionate wailing.

When she looked up and spoke again, her face was harder, her tone harsher, than it had been before, and her eyes had a fierce expression in them.

"You couldn't better quicken my hate for him, and so my loathing for his child, than by speaking to me of my young brother," she said. "When I knelt on the wet river-side grass by Wattie—my dead, drowned, murdered Wattie—didn't I curse that child's father? Didn't I vow——"

"You were mad—you were mad! God, in His mercy, would take no heed of you. You were mad then; you are mad now. If only you'd wait and do nothing till the fever-fire has burnt out of your poor brain!

My dear, my dear, turn your back upon the devil; shut your eyes and your ears to the things he shows you and tells you; put all these horrible thoughts from you; turn to good things and to God."

"Well," she answered, with a daft sort of smile, "the devil is dead, certainly—didn't I see him die? But, nurse, not the devil only, but God also is cruel, if He won't let me forget."

"If only you'd take this little one He sent you into your arms, and let it lie against your heart, gentler thoughts would come. It turns my blood to hear you talk, and see you look with loathing upon this soft, sweet, tender, helpless thing, and it your own, too."

The child, awake now, was lying on the woman's lap. It turned its head upon her knee, and fixed its eyes upon its mother's face. The little dark-eyed baby-face looked elfish and wan in the moonlight.

"His eyes, his eyes!" the girl cried out,

as if in some intolerable torture. And she sprang up, and went away, out of doors.

"They're no eyes but your own—your very own. It's its mother's child all over, the darling, the darling!" the woman crooned over it.

It was not long before the girl came back. Seeing, by the clear moonlight, that the woman's tears were falling thick and fast, she went behind her, twined an arm round her neck, laid her cheek against the tear-stained cheek, and whispered,

"Poor, poor nursie—poor, dear nursie, you're thinking of your own poor little baby, nurse."

"Thinking of my own lost pretty one that I loved so, that John loved so, and that's lying now in the churchyard. Thinking of it, I'm sorry for myself, and I'm sorry for John, and I could cry my heart out for the pity of it; but as for this poor outcast from its mother's love, tears aren't

sad enough, nor bitter enough, to shed for it."

"It will have *you*, nurse. You'll be a better mother to it than I could ever be."

"And if I die? And I'm not strong as I used to be, my dear. Sometimes I think I'll never be well any more."

"If you die," the girl repeated slowly. "Why then it will very likely die too; perhaps it may die first, even." Then she suddenly asked, pointing to the child's white dress, "Is there blood there, nurse? Or is it only in my brain?"

"Your head's getting bad, my dear. Can't you leave it all now, and let us settle it to-morrow?"

"It's all settled, nurse. I go away, and you keep the child. He's to grow up loving you as his mother, and in time you'll forget he's not your own son."

"And then, when I love him as my own, you'll come to your right mind. And then you'll so yearn for your little child, that

you'll feel forced to claim him, if from the other side the world you have to make your way to him on your knees!"

"Nurse!" the girl spoke, at once imperiously and coaxingly. "Leave off talking of this. It tires me, it does me harm. And, nurse, put it away now, the child; lay it in its cradle. I want to be close to you, I want you to pet me this last night. Who knows when we shall be together again?"

"Hold the child a moment, then, while I go and put its things ready."

"I will not!" was the first answer, followed by "you can put it here." She sat down in the chair from which the other had risen, and let the child be laid upon her lap.

She did not mean to look at it; but, in her own despite, her eyes soon fixed themselves upon the sleeping face. She touched one of the tiny hands, and it closed upon her finger, and that instinctive, trustful clasp thrilled her.

"Ah, but he, too, must once have been helpless and harmless," she thought. "Even he must once have lain upon his mother's knees and looked soft and sweet, and this is his son! As well as another I could have loved a child. How I loved baby Wattie!"

Dreaming back upon her tender girlish days, when that little brother had been to her as her very own, and her all, she lifted the sleeping child, her own little son, to her shoulder, pressed her cheek against its cheek, and so, gently swaying to and fro, dreamt on, till she came, in her retrospective dreaming, to the very last memory of Wattie, lying by the river-bank, dead, drowned.

Recalled to herself, to the present, she hastily snatched the child from her shoulder, got up from her chair, and laid the frightened, awakened creature on the cushions.

"His son. The son of Wattie's murderer! And I was holding it as if I loved

it. Nurse!" she called aloud. "Come and take it. Put it out of my sight!"

Nurse, who had been on the watch, came quickly and took the child away. When she returned: "It's not to-morrow you go, for sure, dearie!" she said. "What did you mean about this being the last night?"

"Sit in the great chair again, nurse, I want to sit by you and lay my head in your lap. That is it. Yes, nurse, I go to-morrow. If you look into my room you'll see my dress laid ready. I leave all this," looking down at her heavy black gown, "and everything else, almost, behind me. The dress I've put ready is Daisy Morrison's; it was hers before she was dragged into the pit. It was never worn by *his* wife."

"And your ring, your wedding-ring. It should be taken care of if you don't mean to wear it. The day may come when——"

"Good nurse, no prophesying: a little peace. As to the ring—take it off."

"Nay, my dear, not I!"

"You superstitious woman!"

She wrenched it off herself, and threw it in the woman's lap.

"To think," she said, "that only a few weeks before he put that on me, I almost fancied I loved him! Almost fancied! It was never more than that, and I had wholly unfancied that fancy before I was plunged into it all—and oh! after that, how I loathed him! Life will be hell if I can't forget,—if there's always to be the taint of those months all about me."

Her head on the woman's knees, her hand clasping her hand, Daisy presently said:

"Nurse, you've never asked me to tell you all about it."

"Dearie, I know enough," was soothingly answered.

"You don't know enough if you don't

know all. Some one should know all. There is no one but you, and there is no time but to-night."

"Indeed, in one way or another I know enough, my dear. Don't speak of it, don't think of it, to-night."

But the woman's reluctance to hear strengthened the girl's determination to tell.

"You remember," she began, "he used sometimes to row up the river to our garden and try to tempt Wattie into his boat. One evening—it was very soon after that other you spoke of went away—that other—other, indeed!" Here she seemed to fall into a dream, but soon rousing herself went on. "One evening he was there, and Wattie was in his boat before I knew. 'Come, sister Daisy, we're waiting for you,' my darling called to me. I wouldn't trust him alone. I couldn't bear to make him get out. Graham promised to bring us back in half an hour. I got in. We never came

back. He murdered Wattie, and did worse by me. That devil's cunning—you start to hear me say that bad word! You goose of a nurse, if you only knew what sort of words and things I've heard and seen since then. That devil's cunning had planned it all. If he hadn't had Wattie he'd have failed. I'd have jumped into the river sooner than I'd have gone. Because there was something in his face made me more afraid of him than of the river.

"He said the tide didn't serve to take us back; that we must go on to the first village, and drive home from there. It got dusk; we were past the safe part of the river. I sat clutching Wattie. There was a shock. I know I kept hold of Wattie till he was wrenched from me. His death was murder. Nothing was accident. It was murder! There came a cold swirl of water, and then I knew nothing more till the morning of the next day. I was in a strange room, a strange woman beside me. As

soon as I could understand anything, I asked for Wattie.

"The creature didn't know anything; she said she would call the gentleman; but I wouldn't let her. I said I would go to him. My clothes had been dried, she helped me to put them on, and helped me to go down-stairs. I loathed her touch, even the touch of her eyes; but I couldn't have done without help, I was so deadly ill. Graham was at breakfast. He pretended to be shocked to see me looking so ill. He tried to be fond and tender. I would say nothing, and answer nothing, only asked, 'Where's Wattie?' He swore to me that Wattie had been sent safely home. Then, when I said I wished to go home to him directly, he— You know, nurse, I was such an ignorant fool, and he always so clever; and just then what little sense I had seemed benumbed. I felt, I remember, as if my mind were in a small prison, and knew nothing of anything outside, of any before or after. He pre-

tended passionate remorse, and love, and pity. And he confused me with shame and perplexity, by representing what had happened in the most disastrous light.

"*Now*, I can't believe in my own stupidity then. But he managed then to make me believe that I had no alternative but to be his wife, or to be pointed at by the finger of scorn,—to lead a shamed life. He told me that nobody would ever credit that my having been away from home all night with him was an innocent accident.

"Nurse, don't *you* think it strange that God should let such a weak creature be left so helpless from no fault of her own? It was love for Wattie, care for Wattie, nothing else, Heaven is my witness, that led me into that villain's power.

"Well, when he'd done talking, I was even so stupid a fool as to feel something like gratitude to him for being willing to marry a girl so disgraced.

"We were married that very morning—

as he intended we should be. He wanted to hurry me abroad immediately. When I insisted that first I would go to Wattie, or Wattie must come to me, he left me in anger, and he locked me in. He turned the key very softly, but I heard the sound. My brain was, by this time, growing clearer. What had passed seemed to me an incredibly bad dream. The thought that I was his wife, irrevocably his property, half maddened me.

"I determined I would escape—that, whatever might come after, I would go to Wattie. I hadn't much trouble in getting out of the window. I passed unnoticed through the garden, which ran down to the river's edge. I thought I could make my way home by the river-side path.

"Pushing through some bushes, I suddenly came upon a group of people—my husband one of them—standing round something that lay on the grass. I broke into their midst, and there lay Wattie—my

dead, drowned, murdered Wattie. I knelt by him; I lifted my hands and my eyes to heaven. Words of cursing came to my lips. I cursed his murderer, my husband, to whom I had been married that morning."

She stopped and laughed.

"I don't know what happened just after. I remember I found myself his close-kept prisoner. Our hatred of each other grew finely. He was disappointed in finding he could not get hold of all my money at once —mine and Wattie's, which came to me. He took a sort of fiend's pleasure in making himself as evil a monster as possible in my eyes. To half kill me with fear was his favourite pastime; but after awhile I got too stupid to feel afraid. At times he drank frightfully—drank till he was mad. His worst way of torturing me was to talk to me of the foul horrors of the life he had led and was leading. If I tried to stop my ears, he would pull my hands down and hold them. Sometimes he struck me—not often; he

could do so much worse. It's a nice story, isn't it, nurse?"

The poor woman to whom she told it moaned faintly.

"I'll make it short, nurse; I won't tell you half—only the end. That came at Homburg. I'm not quite sure if he meant to do it; but I think he did; a woman he cared something for had used him ill; besides that, he was in all manner of debt, and difficulty, and disgrace. It was in my room, before my eyes, close to me. He was playing with his pistol. He said he was going to shoot himself, but couldn't make up his mind if he would shoot me first or not. I had heard him talk so before; I tried not to seem afraid. I saw him put the pistol to his mouth. When he did that I turned my eyes away. There was a noise. I felt something on my face and hands. I looked then, and didn't know what it was I saw. What, nurse, you turn faint to hear of it?

"I don't know much of what happened after, or of how I got here. I had just written to you, I know. I suppose the address upon the letter—anyway, I got here, and his child was born. And you want me to love it—to love his child!" She laughed wildly.

It was now just midnight, and the sound of a horse's footfall ("John" coming home from a distant market-town) was very welcome to John's poor wife. The girl rose quickly, on hearing it, to hurry to her own room.

"John will go with you to-morrow," were "nurse's" last words.

"Will he? There's no need he should take the trouble; but it's very kind. Thank him for me. Be sure you thank him for this kindness, and for all his other kindness."

Then, as the farmer entered the kitchen, Daisy fled up the stairs to her room. She had never met him face to face; she never

would meet anyone. Having put out the candle and drawn up the blind, she sat still until the old-fashioned clock outside her door had ten times chimed the quarters; as it finished its tenth chime she got up, and, moving about noiselessly, put off her widow's-weeds, and put on the dress laid ready on the bed.

By the time this was done the dawn had overgrown the moonlight, and she looked at herself in the glass. There she stood—Daisy Morrison, Wattie's "Sister Daisy."

Stealing noiselessly down the stair, letting herself out of the house cautiously—it was easy to make no noise, the doors at Moor-Edge were neither locked nor barred, and the old dog sleeping by the kitchen hearth knew her too well to notice her, except by a sleepy movement of his tail—Daisy passed, before sunrise, into the world of Summer dawn. She did not take the track leading to the white road that crossed the common; she would have been, by-and-by, liable to

meet people there, and could be seen from so great a distance. She took the footway that descended precipitously to the plain, between the high hedges. It was as yet too early to meet even labourers going to their work. As yet no smoke from early-lighted fires curled from the cottage chimneys. The world of dawn was stainless and speckless.

The ambrosial morning freshness, and the feeling that she was leaving behind her the widow's dress, the wedding-ring, the child, which were the signs of what had been so loathsome in her life, had a strong effect upon Daisy. It was with an elastic, almost dancing step that she went her way; she felt as if, bathing in the purity of the dawn, she were being cleansed.

"I shall be able, in time, to forget. In so beautiful a world I shall be able, in time, to be happy! No need to hate this beautiful world, for I shall be able to forget—and —he is no longer in it."

By-and-by she paused, turned, and looked back at Moor-Edge, just before finally passing out of sight of it.

"But if what she says is true—about a mother's heart—then I carry my trouble with me—within me. A mother's heart! How can I have a mother's heart for his child?"

The new glory had faded when she went on again. Whether she looked up to the clear morning blue, or looked before her through the clear air down upon the plain, her child's face, with eyes pleading and reproachful, floated before her. But she went on.

CHAPTER II.

"OH! I'd so much rather not!" was spoken with a startled face, and with an ashamed consciousness of the absurdity of the words, which, nevertheless, were at the moment the only words she could find to say.

Daisy was sitting by the fire, in the between-lights hour, in a small but very pretty drawing-room; sitting in a low chair, her little feet warming themselves cosily. She was again dressed in black, but the black was now worn for one whom she had loved and served, and the mourning for whom had softened her face to a tender seriousness rather than sorrow.

From the time, now eighteen months ago,

when she first saw the frail invalid, whose dying days she had solaced, she had led that un-selfed life which, more than any other, deadens and keeps under personal perplexities and troubles. Each morning she had wakened to give all the day to her dying friend; each night she had lain on the watch for her, only sleeping when she slept. No more wholesome life could have been found for Daisy.

But now Daisy's friend was some weeks dead. Daisy's occupation was gone.

"So much rather not!" she repeated. She had spoken the first time, looking straight before her into the fire. This time she turned to look round, and up, at some one standing half behind her, the earnestness of startling appeal that was in her face as she did so, causing this some one a grim kind of amusement.

How pretty she looked, he was thinking, the firelight glancing on the soft round throat that rose from the black bodice, and

shining on the small white hands clasped on her knee. The chair she sat in being very low, and he being rather tall, her head had to be thrown far back before her eyes could meet his. They did this only for a flash, and were then again averted.

"'Much rather not!' What sort of an answer is that to give a man to such a question? And pray why would you 'so much rather not?'"

"Because—well, because I would so much rather not! Because I'm so tired, and because anything new, any great change, would be . . . would be—— Oh! Kenneth, you know I never could express myself properly."

"Would be—what?"

"So troublesome."

"'So troublesome!'"

"It is rude and unkind of you to laugh at me."

"But, Daisy, you want laughing at, you want well laughing at. You ought to be

laughed out of such childish, or old-maidish ideas."

"And if I am old-maidish," she said, her face flushing vividly,—with annoyance at the term, he thought,—"I'd rather remain so: I'd so much rather remain just as I am. Kenneth, dear Kenneth, if you please, don't trouble me. Don't be angry with me; just let me remain as I am."

The poor little coward dreaded agitation, with a physical and a mental dread: she dreaded love, she dreaded joy, dreaded everything likely to stir her heart and her life out of its brief quiet.

"'Don't trouble you,'" he very uncourteously again echoed her words. "And wouldn't you take a little 'trouble' to make me happy, Daisy? If not, I've been much mistaken in Daisy. Do you think trouble the worst thing in the world, and comfort the best? If so, you are not my Daisy, but some lazy, spoilt little woman. What is the meaning of it all, Daisy?"

She struggled with herself a moment, struggled for the power to speak lightly. Then she said,

"I will answer you in the words of my favourite, Sir Dinadan, King Arthur's only ladyless knight, you know, who says, 'The joy of love is too short, and the sorrow thereof, and what cometh thereof dureth over-long.'"

"You have been studying in a bad school."

"I will quote from another master, then. It is Chaucer who says,

> "'For love is yet the moste stormy lyf,
> Right of himself, that ever was begunne,
> For ever some mystrust, or nice stryf,
> Ther is in love, some cloudis in that sunne.'"

Her friend considered her carefully while she spoke, and, after she had spoken, kept silent. He was conscious of a curious thrill of some sort of passion through her attempt at light playfulness, and he called to mind (it was not strikingly visible now by the

firelight) how, once or twice, he had been pained by the look of careworn age that would creep over the childish, soft face.

This silence of his troubled Daisy; she was more afraid of it than of any such speech as had, as yet, been between them.

"If you knew," she said, "how happy these last months have been to me, and how I needed the rest their peace has given me, you, who are so good, so unselfish, would not ask me to think of any change."

"Is all the unselfishness to be on my side, Daisy?"

"But you, too, have seemed very happy."

"No, not that. I have been pleasing myself with the hope that I was about to be very happy."

At this moment a servant brought in the lamp. She shut out the twilight, and muffled a thrush's song by closing shutters and drawing curtains.

Daisy immediately rose from her low chair by the fire, and seating herself at

the table, took up her work, to which she devoted herself with a spasmodic sort of energy. In her fear of silence she began to talk as she worked, of anything, so that it was nothing, and safe to lead to nothing. Of the lateness and the coldness of this year's early Spring; but of how, now, at last, that cold seemed over, and everything was budding and blooming miraculously.

To all she said Mr. Stewart answered not a word, and by-and-by Daisy came to a discomforted pause. Then he spoke meditatively:

"It is strange to think, Daisy, that there are two or three years of your life of which I know absolutely nothing. I who, up to the time of my going to India to fetch home poor Lily and her children, saw you every day, knew how every hour of your day was spent, almost."

"What would there be to know of any years of such a life as mine?"

"That is it. What should there be to

know of any years of such a quiet, lonely, innocent life. This is how I fill in those years; just tell me if I do so rightly."

Involuntarily Daisy stayed the movement of her busy hand; she held her breath, and felt as if she would like to stay the beating of her heart.

"After the accident through which you lost Wattie—some day, Daisy, you must tell me more exactly how that was—your old home grew too painfully distasteful to you; you went to stay with your good nurse, who had then lately married; from there you answered the call of your cousin. But you must have paid 'nurse' (I don't know that you have told me her present name, or where she lives) a long visit, Daisy?"

"She did not get tired of me."

"I suppose I may conclude that this was all."

"You haven't reckoned my surprise when my consin brought me to Redcombe, your uncle's property. Your uncle's death and

your coming home, his heir, are nothing in your history."

"Yes, they are a great deal in my history, but you don't hold them much in yours. Possibly you would have shunned Redcombe had you known that, coming here, you might soon have so 'troublesome' a neighbour."

"Possibly I should, Kenneth."

"So that was all!—And yet, Daisy," he went on, after a pause, "it seems to me that is not, cannot be, all—that there has been something more. Something that has given you a look of careworn weariness, which you, who are so young, ought not to have; something that makes you speak the truth when you say—what you are always saying—that you are 'so tired.'"

There was a gloomy fold on his forehead now. He averted his eyes from her face and fixed them on the fire, as he began again:

"Daisy, there is one thing I have often

wondered about, one thing I have often been on the point of asking you about, but was afraid—afraid my words might pain you, afraid they might touch some wound——"

"They would, they would;—beyond what I could bear, they would pain me!" cried Daisy. "Wonder about nothing—ask me about nothing. Leave me alone, only leave me alone, dear Kenneth, leave me alone. You know I am a coward, and can't bear pain. Have pity!"

"Just one question; if you are not brave I think you will bear a little pain to save me much—unless you are wholly altered from the Daisy I knew and loved. Just one question. What has become of——"

"He is dead," gasped Daisy; "he died horribly, by his own hand."

"Good Heavens!" He turned and looked at her now; her face could not have been whiter, and her eyes were strained and dilated, as if that horror (which, as he sup-

posed, she could only have seen in imagination) were re-enacting before them.

"My poor, poor child! Why did you never tell me? If you had told me, then I should have understood everything."

"Why did I never tell you!" she echoed almost fiercely. "Was it a thing I was likely to speak of? Was it a thing I should recal if I could help? I had almost left off being haunted by the memory of it, and now, Kenneth, you cruel Kenneth, you have brought it all back."

"Forgive me, Daisy, and tell me, that I may never need to come near the subject again, just one or two things more. Did he—did you——"

But while he bungled, not knowing how most innocently to frame his question, Daisy sprang up, quivering.

"I cannot bear it! I cannot! How dare you torture me so? It is no use; I tell you I cannot bear it!"

As she spoke, she moved towards the door.

"No, no, don't go away," he said, soothingly, following her, bringing her back to her chair. "If it is true you cannot bear it, I will never touch the matter again. But, Daisy, if you would only have a few minutes' courage and patience, it would be so much the happier way. If you would just tell the story out, and then come to me to weep your tears——"

"I will tell you nothing. And what is more, you must promise not to question me again, ever. If you don't give me this promise, Kenneth, I shan't be able to bear to see you or to hear you speak."

"This is all terribly morbid, mere madness." He noted the wild trouble of her affrighted eyes, and hastened to add, "But you have my promise, Daisy. I need not say that I shall keep it. But some day you will release me from it. Some day when our hearts are so close that there is room for nothing between them."

"You speak," she said, "as if—as if—

you speak, I mean, as I have given you no right to speak."

"I own my presumption."

There was an interval of silence.

Mr. Stewart had thrown himself into Daisy's low chair, and sat looking into the fire with a baffled expression. Daisy worked away again with spasmodic energy. Her heart had just begun to beat quietly once more, when Mr. Stewart came from the fireside, and took a chair at the little table just opposite her.

"Daisy, be so good as to put down your work, and listen to me."

"I can listen just as well while I work."

But he put his hand over hers, and held it still.

"Tyrant! I wish you had pricked yourself!"

"It's my heart, Daisy, and not my hand, of which you make a pincushion."

"That's nonsense, Kenneth."

"Of course that's nonsense, Daisy. I

never supposed it would pass with you for anything else. But now I'm going to talk sense, in sober seriousness. Daisy, I wish to have a wife."

"Well, Kenneth, I suppose that is quite natural."

"I think it is. I'm tired of being always alone. Alone when I'm sad, alone when I'm gay, alone when I'm sick, alone when I'm well. I'm tired of it. It's dreary. I want a wife."

"Well, Kenneth, I'm sure I don't see any reason why you shouldn't have a wife. You're not too old to marry, or too ugly, or too poor. You're kind and good. You won't have any difficulty in finding a wife."

She kept her eyes fixed upon his hand, still overlying her hand. He could not see their expression, but he fancied a slight tremor in her voice when she said, "You're kind and good."

"But just 'a wife' would not satisfy me, Daisy."

"You surely don't mean you want more than one, Kenneth?"

"I mean, as you well know, Daisy, that I don't want just any one. In fact, there is in the world just one woman I want for my wife."

"If that is so, Kenneth, and she doesn't want to marry, or doesn't want to marry you, it's an unhappy thing for you; because, I suppose, in that case, 'Want,' as used to be said to me when I was a child, 'must be your master.'"

"But, Daisy, she is such a tender, gentle loving little woman, that I think she would take me out of pity, because I want her, if she once clearly understood how desperately I want her."

"That would be wicked in her, Kenneth, and miserable for you—if she didn't love you."

"But there it is, Daisy; there's the pity of it. I fancy she does love me—loves me as dearly as I could wish—but is letting her

brain be over-clouded by some absurd cobweb or other, which, if I can't get at it, to brush it away, may destroy both her happiness and mine."

Daisy, trying to keep up a jesting tone, murmured something of the vanity of men. Not heeding her, Mr. Stewart went on:

"That she loves no one better than she loves me, I, at least, feel sure. She has brown eyes, that look loving when they look into mine. She has soft, smooth, brown hair, that often tempts my hand to stroke it; and I hardly think, if it did so, she would be angry. She has the sweetest mouth in the world, with just one fault, that it doesn't smile often enough, though it looks as if meant to be always smiling. She has a dear little soft hand, that seems always glad to come into mine."

Daisy, at last, looked up at him, and there was a world of flitting, flying trouble in those eyes.

"It's no use to pretend I don't under-

stand you, Kenneth; but, indeed, Kenneth, it can't, can't, can't be. There are reasons of which you know nothing, of which you guess nothing, why it can't be. If only you'd let me alone! Kenneth, dear Kenneth, pray, pray leave me alone."

"But, Daisy, this sort of answer is too childish; it is ridiculous, dear,—unworthy of you. Because, now a good while ago, and when you were little more than a child, you loved, or believed you loved, a man unworthy of love, is this to stand between you and love for ever after? You say there are reasons of which I know, and can guess, nothing. But there cannot be, beyond some trifles, in themselves nothing, magnified by your morbidness; you are making mountains of molehills."

"Am I, Kenneth?" There was bitterness in her smile. "Would to Heaven I could think so! It is not love, or the memory of love, that stands between me and love; but something does stand be-

tween, and must, all my lifetime. So, Kenneth—dear Kenneth,—leave me in peace. I want nothing but quiet, of mind and body. The things I most honestly thank God for are darkness and sleep; the thing I fervently pray to Him for is that He will let me forget. Kenneth, it would kill me to do what you wish. It can't, can't, can't be; I am not fit for you. Leave me in peace."

On his part a few minutes of frowning thoughtfulness; then he returned to the charge.

"In all you say I can only see the outcome of a morbidly overgrown sensitiveness. What you call peace is not peace, but stagnation. As to forgetting, you will best forget by letting your life be filled with new things—new hope and love. You are a woman meant to find your happiness in loving and being loved, and in living for those you love; not in the selfish, lonely comfort and quiet of an old maid's life. Think how selfish all you have said has

been. It is all of what you want, with no thought for me. I, too, want rest and peace. Till I know that one roof covers you and me, I shall not know either. In fact, Daisy, I so want you that my life is one want till I have you."

"Have pity, Kenneth; you torture me."

He looked straightly down into her appealing eyes—eyes that, even while they appealed, contracted as if with pain, and shrank from his scrutiny.

"I torture you, do I, poor Daisy? That is the last thing I would do, except for your good. Well, I have almost done. I will only ask you, just for one moment, to put yourself in my place. I want a wife, and you are the only woman I will marry; I want a home—not a house, but a home,—and you are the only woman who can make one for me. Isn't my case a hard one, Daisy? Mightn't you make some sacrifice —of pride, or reserve, or whatever it is— for me? Look at me critically, Daisy.

Don't I look as if it were time I had some comfort in life? See how grey I'm getting; see how bald I'm getting. Am I not thin and gaunt? Don't I look uncared for? Putting aside happiness, what even of comfort have I had in life? Think how cosy we are here, Daisy; and by-and-by you will turn me out into the raw night. Listen to the rain. I shall be wet to the skin when I get home. There will be no fire to warm me, and nobody to notice whether I'm wet or dry."

"As if you cared for such things!"

Daisy spoke scornfully. She was irritated; she fancied there was a twinkle of humour about his mouth. It seemed as if what was such terrible tragedy to her was to him only comedy. As if he were either indifferent to success, or very confident of it.

"I didn't say I did care for such things; but I thought you might care about them for me, Daisy. And without caring about

being cold and wet, I might get a chill, and die of it."

"You have only your own wilfulness to blame if you cannot have the common comforts of life. You often used to call me wilful, but it is you who are wilful now, saying you want a wife, and setting your mind upon a woman you can't have as the only one you will have."

"That is not wilfulness, Daisy; that is wisdom; besides, that I can't have you has yet to be proved."

"Oh! of course."

Daisy was glad to feel herself growing hot and angry. It was so much less painful to be angry with him than to be sorry for him.

"In a weak creature," he went on, "the determination to be satisfied with nothing but something it can't get would be mere wilfulness; but, Daisy, I am not weak, and I mean to get the one thing that is the one thing that can satisfy me."

Looking up into his eyes, Daisy flushed, and trembled, and quailed.

"Kenneth, Kenneth, don't say so!" she cried, piteously. "Oh, if only anything I could say would make you give it up, and leave me in peace!"

"There are words that would do this. If you can look me full in the face and say, 'Kenneth, *I don't* love you—I never have loved you—I never shall love you,' then I will go away, and leave you in peace."

Instead, she bowed her face into her hands, murmuring something about his cruelty, and that she ought to hate him. Then, after a time, she looked up, to say, "But, Kenneth, it cannot be. I will not, I cannot, marry you. I am not fit for you."

"You have said those words, that you are not fit for me, several times. What do you mean by them?"

She made him no answer. He began to walk to and fro in the room.

"There can be no middle course," he said by-and-by. "If you insist in your determination to have nothing to do with me——"

She murmured that she had expressed no such determination.

"Yes, you have. I want all or nothing. You refuse me all, so I will have nothing. I am not a fellow who can be kept dangling on on sufferance. Well, then, if you have given me my final answer, if I must take it as such, then it must be good-bye, Daisy. I shall leave the neighbourhood. If I were able, I would stay near you, to watch over you at a distance (rather an Irish proceeding, but you know what I mean), but I am not able for that. I should not be able to keep away from you. I should be always annoying you."

"You never do annoy me, except when——"

"Except when I ask you to be my wife. I should never be able to see you without

asking you, so I should be always annoying you. Besides, Daisy, there are other things I am bound to consider for you. This is a wicked and scandal-loving world. You live alone now—you have lost the protection of your poor cousin's presence. You live alone, and you are a young and pretty single woman. If you won't have me for your husband, you can't have me for your friend."

Her cheeks burnt with hot colour; she answered him very meekly,

"Very well, Kenneth; it must, of course, be as you think best."

If he had known the blank sense of desolation that fell upon her!

"Very well, Daisy," he mocked her angrily. "I've already pleaded, argued, and threatened as much as I can. I did think you cared enough for me to set aside your cold-hearted, morbid, old-maidish scruples. As it is not so, this evening's good night had better be good-bye."

"Very well, Kenneth. Good night—good-bye."

"You wretched little unfeeling creature! What on earth could make me care for you as I always have done—as I always shall do?"

"What, indeed! I have often wondered."

"Good night, Daisy, not good-bye. I think I will see you once more."

"Good night, Kenneth. I am glad you will see me once more."

He went away without touching her hand. She listened to his step along the gravel, she heard the garden-gate swing to, and latch itself after him, and then——

First she sat some moments with clasped hands, gazing straight out into the desolation of her life; then she laid her head on the table, and cried as if she would cry that desolate life away. For how long she did not know. She was presently startled by a light touch on her hair; then a voice said,

"Daisy! my poor little crushed flower! Have I hurt you so much? Did I tease you so cruelly? But you were cruel too, Daisy."

She laid her cheek against his hand, and then she kissed his hand. She tried to speak, but a fresh burst of sobs choked back the words. He spoke soothingly and fondly. Once more she struggled to say something.

"It is that I—I—— Oh! I am not what you think me! I——" Again the "climbing sorrow" in her throat made speech impossible, and what she had spoken had been barely audible. There came one despairing effort: "If only I were dead, and you knew all!" Then she laid her head down again and kept still.

"My poor Daisy! My poor Daisy!" A thoughtful pause. Then he said, "There can be nothing I don't know that really matters. Perhaps I can guess at a good deal, can understand how your innocent, over-sensitive heart reproaches you with

treachery, because, perhaps, after I left you, you were entrapped, betrayed into what was not in harmony with the implied promise of your last words to me. You were a guileless child, Daisy, and could have been no match for your adversary. I am tempted to wish I had strangled the fellow before he crossed your path. I don't say that there is not much that painfully perplexes me. That you believed you loved him I can understand; few women could resist him, but that your love for him should so long linger that——"

"My love for him!" As she looked up now, fiercely and suddenly, the passion of her face startled him. "My love for him is as fresh in my heart as the day I lost him. Now you know that, Kenneth, you will leave me in peace. He was a liar and a treacherous coward, I know; he was a murderer, I believe. Is a woman who loved a liar, a treacherous coward, a murderer, fit to be loved by you?"

"This is very wild talking, Daisy. This is the madness not of love, but of hate."

"Who can tell what it is! Only God. Madness! didn't you know I was mad. Mad, more or less, ever since——Wattie died. May not that stand between us, Kenneth? Would you like a mad wife?"

"If I thought it true, Daisy, I would at once possess myself of you. You should marry me to-morrow: that you might need no other keeper. I would deny your right to have a will about it, if I believed you mad."

"Is there nothing will frighten you from me? Is there no way in which I can be rid of you?"

"I have told you the one only way. I will go now for to-night, that you may get rest."

She lifted sad pleading eyes to him. She had half a notion that she was looking on him for the last time; that for his sake she might have strength some way to end things.

She wished he would bend down to kiss her, but he did not. There was only a very tenderly spoken "Good-night, Daisy," and he was gone.

As he walked home he recalled some words of Daisy's that had been among the last words she had spoken to him before he left England.

"I've been thinking, Kenneth, of what you told me about Graham. I know it's true, because you told me. As it's true he can't be good. I shouldn't like to" (how well he remembered the pretty flush and hesitation with which the next word was spoken) "marry any one who isn't good. I want making good, and keeping good myself. He has no promise of mine, and, Kenneth, he never will have. I tell you this now, because I have seen that you are anxious about me."

How well he remembered the exact how and when and where those words of Daisy's had been spoken! They had stood to-

gether at the glass door of the drawing-room of what was then Daisy's home, looking down the bright lawn to the shining river. He remembered how confidingly she had clung to his arm—how, while she was speaking, she kept brushing away from his sleeve petals from the overblown roses that kept falling there. He remembered how sweet and how fair he had felt her; he remembered the hard fight he had fought to hinder himself from clasping her in his arms and saying,

"Wait for me, Daisy. It is I who love you. Wait for me; be my wife."

He remembered how hard it had been when, at parting, the sweet, fresh mouth was lifted for his kiss, to leave unsaid any word that should have startled the child to consciousness of the love with which he loved her.

But at that time Mr. Stewart was not only poor, but had others dependent upon him. At that time he had no thought of

the possibility of succeeding to Redcombe Manor, there being then two lives, to all appearance as "good" as his, between him and such succession.

When Daisy found herself alone, she set herself to think if, in any way, she might win into this heaven of happiness which seemed to stand open to her with a visible door, while by an invisible door it was close shut. There seemed to be two ways, if only either were possible. Suppose she yielded to his wish, and let him make her his wife, leaving all her secret undisclosed, letting things go as they would, leaving the future to shape itself? Perhaps, had she believed in her own power to be, in this way, happy, she might have chosen this course, deceiving herself with the sophistry that she yielded for his sake. But Daisy knew she could not, so, be happy; knew that, sooner or later, the misery of concealment would become unendurable, and then it seemed to her his sorrow over her sin,

his grief at her deceit, when he should come to know, would kill her. She remembered, in long-past times, how he had looked when she was "naughty"—when she talked perversely, and acted wilfully. Remembering the pain, which seemed both mental and physical, his face had at such times expressed, she had only to imagine a proportionate suffering in him when his wife should convict herself of such secretness and treacherous deception, to believe that he might well die of such anguish. That way, then, was not the possible way. What of the other? To tell him everything, and trust to his love being so strong that, in spite of everything, he should still wish her for his wife! Was this the possible way? No, no, no, she decided.

"If I knew that he knew, there would be times when I should not but be forced to believe that he must think of me with disgust. How could I bear this? I could not bear it. No, there is no way in which

I may be his wife—I could not be his wife, and deceive him. I cannot be his wife if he knows. What, then, is there left for me to do?"

Daisy did not sleep this night. She tried to plan some future. If only there were but some place and some person in the world to whom and to which he would be satisfied that she should go, then possibly in time he might forget her, and learn to be happy—alone, or with some other. But there was no such person and there was no such place.

From the misery and perplexity of this sleepless night Daisy could not seek help in prayer. How can we pray when there stands on the threshold of spiritual consciousness the knowledge that the thing we ought to do is the thing we mean, if we can help it, never to do? When we refuse to have the open eye and open ear, and choose to be among those whose ears are dull of hearing, and whose eyes are closed, must

not the lips of the heart be shut from praying?

And thus it was with Daisy. She could only sob, till sobbing ceased from mere exhaustion; then turn on her pillow, trying to sleep, and find some fresh aspect of her sorrow bring a fresh burst of sobbing. Between her and the power to pray stood the consciousness that she knew what she had to do, but could not, would not, do it.

"If you will not have me for your husband, you cannot have me for your friend."

He had said so. It was true. Must she be always and utterly alone?

It was this night that, for the first time, or rather it was in the morning after this night, when she opened her casement wide at dawn, and leaned out into the dewy grey fragrance of growth and life—it was then that, for the first time, in thinking of her child, she was conscious of a dim yearning, sweet and strong, as yet passing her by, touching her as it passed, rather than enter-

ing into her; seeming a part of the soft mist of Spring rather than anything personal.

"Perhaps it is dead!" She shivered, the balmy air seeming to turn chill at the thought. "If I knew it was dead, or if I knew it would be sure to die before it grew up, then I could love it! Any way, I should like to look on its sleeping face once more, and once more to feel its tiny hand close round my finger."

After this, often, on Spring evenings, the mist-veiled stars would seem to her like the tear-dimmed eyes of little children, and the soft wind of the Summer nights like the breath of little children. And she was never more able to forget that she had a child. She kept count of the weeks and the months of his age; and at any cottage child who numbered the same she would look with wistful wonder, marvelling if to that stature had grown her own little son.

It was with Daisy now much as it is, in the Spring-time, with the wood primroses,

when they push their leaf-lances and their little buds through the thick-lying dead leaves, the rotting beech-mast, or the empty acorn cups, the fallen bits of hoary lichen, and the broken lichened twigs and boughs, pushing through to the softening air and the sunshine. What of fresh youth was left in Daisy was coming to life again, was struggling through and pushing aside the memories of the horrors and miseries and disgusts that had fallen upon and stifled her.

Poor Daisy! Though she often felt so old, so old, and as weary as if she had all but done with life, hers was a girlish heart still, and a passionate girlish heart.

Daisy's love of nature was passionate, and perhaps, when one is still young, the passionate love of irresponsive nature is rarely unaccompanied by longing for responsive love, a longing unconscious of what it desires, and yet a conscious longing.

A thrush's singing through the Spring twilights, the Summer incense of woodbines

at dewfall, rich sunsets and "mellow moon-births," the sound of distant village bells, the dream-beauty of the sunny sleep of a September day, with the dew staying all day on the brambles in the deep hill-hollows, and gossamers lying all about on the grey hill-sides, and the soft pale sunlight on the corn-slopes of late uplands, these things had always had power to touch Daisy nearly and deeply.

A mist of bluebells in an April copse, a primrose-starred bank, a flush of wild-roses in a sunset hedge, a group of queenly white lilies in a moonlit garden, the music of bells, of brooks, of birds, the flooding fragrance of Summer blossoms, would stir in her a sweet sad longing; such a longing as makes many of us yearn towards something that is not, that never can be; a something that, if found, would enable us to hear the secret of things, to taste the sweetness of things, to live, not to lead a misty, sorrowful, dreamy existence, but to live to the core.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER she had opened her casement to the fresh air of dawn, Daisy fell asleep. She slept late, and woke to a morning of exquisite brightness.

Night had not brought wisdom, nor darkness counsel, but morning brought hope—of what?

Of a pause in her troubles, of a few quiet days.

Daisy was selfish and cowardly; but there was excuse to be made for her. She had suffered so much, while she was still unripe for suffering well and wisely, that she had suffered with mere animal endurance, getting, therefore, the bane and not the blessing of suffering. While the down, the

bloom, the dew had been still upon all her girlish imaginings, she had been suddenly subjected to the rudest disillusions, buffeted by the most outrageous shocks of knowledge, not of good and evil, but of evil only. It was, indeed, as if an unawakened maiden soul had been seized and plunged into hell for its awakenment.

It seemed to Daisy that it had been with her as with the fated ship, which, in a rude engraving that had exercised a horrible fascination over her as a child, was being sucked into the vortex of a whirlpool.

Nevertheless, so much of elasticity remained, that the brisk brightness of the Spring to-day almost enabled her to forget the misery of yesterday and the hopelessness of to-morrow.

A wood fire was burning cheerily on the hearth when she came down to the breakfast-room. The table was set near the open window, and the sunshine fell upon its snowy cloth, bright silver, and delicate china.

Out-doors a fresh, but soft, south-west wind was chasing April shadow and April shine across lawn and flower-border, rippling the bed of many-coloured anemones, and filling the golden cups of late crocuses.

In the orchard, which was full in sight, were some grand old pear-trees, now one mass of blossom; the boles of the elm-trees, which, on another side, sheltered the garden, were just a-flutter with fresh-fledged leaflets. It was a world of life and motion; of shimmer and shine, glitter and gleam; and the time of the singing of birds was, indeed, come.

Daisy stood at the window.

"How beautiful the world is! Surely, somewhere in it is some place meant for me to be happy in," was her childish thought. And then she stood there in a dream, till the servant coming in with the coffee, roused her, and she turned to the table.

Three or four letters lay beside her plate;

but Daisy never had letters of any interest, and they roused no curiosity. As she sat there with fresh morning face, in her fresh morning dress, a glass of flowers beside her, every now and then stretching her hand into the sunshine, feeling it sweet, the belief was strong upon her that some sweetness, some sunshine must, somehow, be meant to fall upon and enter into her life.

Foolish Daisy! She might have known how empty was all this momentary content. If the parting of last night had been, indeed, "good-bye," and not "good-night," the soft, fresh wind might have blown upon her, the sun might have shone upon her, the flowers have sent forth their fragrance, and the birds their song, and all the beauty and sweetness of life would have been as nothing to her, or even as worse than nothing.

Presently came a click of the latch of the garden-gate, a step upon the winding gravell-

ed way, and then, as she knew before she saw, a face at the open window.

"I couldn't help coming to look at you: I had such a horrible dream about you last night."

"Don't tell it me! On such a morning one doesn't wish to hear of horrible things."

"Indeed, Daisy, I had no thought of telling it to you!"

"I wonder what it was like, Kenneth?"

"As unlike you as possible; and it is a blessed thing, Daisy of Daisies, to look upon you sitting there with your fresh morning face, and to know my dream was only a dream."

"He could dream nothing about me so bad as the truth," thought Daisy; but she said—

"What a morning it is, Kenneth! I feel as if I could be happy in the way the birds are, sitting singing in the sun, not

conscious of yesterday, or caring for to-morrow."

He smiled.

"Will you give me a cup of tea?" he asked.

"Indeed I will. You look as if you wanted that, or something."

"I do want that, and something."

"Will you have it there, or will you come in?"

"I should be glad to sit down; I'm tired, so I will come in."

He left the window to enter the house.

"Just happy to-day, at least to-day," was what she whispered to herself, as she rang to order a cup and plate for Mr. Stewart. Mr. Stewart was so habitual a visitor at the cottage, that his presence there, at any time, as yet provoked no remark.

"Why, what a lot of letters!" commented Mr. Stewart, half jealously. "I didn't know you had any correspondents."

"I haven't opened them—I know by the outsides what they are. You shall know, too, if you will. This is from my dress-maker—this contains a packet of flower-seeds—this is about some books—and this," she paused, examined the post-marks, of which there were many, then tore that letter open—her face sharp with sudden agitation.

"Well?"

The expression with which she looked up was at once puzzled and relieved.

"A most perplexing letter! Surely not meant for me. It begins, 'My dear unknown aunt,' and ends," turning the letter over, "'your prepared-to-be-affectionate niece, Myrrha Brown.' I didn't know I had a niece. How can I have a niece? Surely it's some mistake altogether."

"Brown—Myrrha Brown!" Mr. Stewart meditated: then a sudden light broke upon him. "I think I can guess, Daisy, who she must be. The name, Myrrha, is as un-

common as it is, I think, ugly. It was, I remember, the name of your father's daughter by his unhappy first marriage."

"I had forgotten, perhaps I hardly knew, that papa had been married before he married mamma. I was so young when he died."

"Yes, and he was a reserved man, not likely to speak before you of such things. But he had a daughter, and her name was Myrrha, and she made a clandestine marriage, of which he strongly disapproved, running away from the French school at which he had placed her when he married your mother. I don't know that I ever heard the name of the man she married—he was an American, I remember, and they went to live among the French colonists in America. No doubt his name was Brown, and this correspondent of yours is their daughter."

"But, Kenneth, how could this girl possibly find me out?"

"That would be easy enough, Daisy, to any one knowing how to set about it. It is very possible your father kept up some sort of communication with them, the Browns, while he lived; no doubt they had the address of his lawyer. I don't know that I should have any so distinct recollection of the name of Myrrha, had it not been for a most lovely miniature of that Myrrha, which used to hang in your father's dressing-room, when I was a boy and you were a baby. In later years it wasn't there. It represented a girl of about, I should think, seventeen, with a profusion of very fair fine hair, with gleeful-looking blue eyes, and an exquisite complexion, rather pale, but tinged with a delicate shell, or wild-rose, pink. If the daughter is like the mother, she is a pretty creature. But what does she write to you about, Daisy?"

"I haven't been able to find out, Kenneth."

"May I try?"

"Of course you may."

Meanwhile he had taken up and was examining the envelope.

"It has been a good while on the road," he said; "it has been, among other places, to your old home, Daisy. What place is this—Littlehampton—where is that?"

"That is where nurse lives."

"Littlehampton is where nurse lives." Then he asked, eagerly, "Where is Littlehampton? How do you get at it? I should uncommonly like to see nurse again some day."

Daisy turned from crimson to white, then red again.

"I mean," she said, "that is where she did live when she was first married. I forget the name of the place she lives at now."

"I wonder why Daisy is telling me a falsehood? I think it would be better and more like Daisy to be truthful, and to trust me."

"Kenneth!"

Daisy was, at once, ashamed, pained, startled, and angry. But Mr. Stewart, who had spoken with an affectation of only thinking aloud, took no notice of Daisy's explanation, but appeared intent upon the reading of Myrrha Brown's letter.

"A clever young lady, I should say! I suppose you read the postscript?"

"I didn't know there was a postscript."

"Oh! yes, there is, and it contains the gist of the letter. It informs you that your prepared-to-be-affectionate niece, Myrrha Brown, is on her way to pay her dear unknown aunt, Daisy, a visit."

"To visit me, Kenneth?"

"To visit you, Daisy."

"I won't have her—I can't. I don't know her. Even if I did, I couldn't bear to have any one always about."

"It might be good for you, Daisy—she may be a nice girl, and you are too much alone."

"Good for me! It would be intolerable to me, Kenneth."

"You'll get used to it, you shy little soul. For my part, I shall welcome Miss Myrrha Brown—her coming seems to me most opportune."

"Do you mean I must let her come?"

"I most decidedly mean you must let her come."

"Oh, Kenneth!"

"I don't think you could help letting her come. I think it probable she will be here before you could tell her not to come. The letter has been a good deal delayed. I should not be surprised if she were here to-day."

"Here to-day!" Daisy repeated.

Not ten minutes had elapsed, and they were still discussing Miss Brown, when "Behold she comes!" Mr. Stewart cried, pointing with a tragic air to an open vehicle —a "fly" from the small country station, coming down the lane.

Daisy looked into Mr. Stewart's face with such unmistakable dismay in her own, that, instead of laughing at her, he laid a kind hand on her shoulder, saying—

"Courage, little woman! I will help you all I can. Don't let this young person think herself alarming enough to put Aunt Daisy in a flutter."

By this time the fly had stopped at the garden-gate, and there stepped out of it a tall, slight young lady, elegantly "got-up" in the style of the period—that is to say, with a picturesqueness somewhat theatrical, but still a graceful and piquant creature so graceful and piquant, that one needs to be a somewhat stern moralist (or, what comes to the same thing, a crabbed old bachelor, whom no girl dresses to please, a sour and ill-favoured old maid, whom conformity with such fashion would make ridiculous, or the father of many daughters, smarting under too frequent and too heavy attacks upon his purse) to

cavil at and condemn. Of course, there is a higher ground on which this style of dress may be considered objectionable—it is too evidently designed, not merely to please, but to attract, to be in harmony with any ideal of what woman's dress should be.

"What can I do with such a visitor in such a place?" Daisy exclaimed, as she went down the garden-path, followed by Mr. Stewart.

Miss Brown rushed upon her unknown aunt impulsively; demonstrations of affection, apologies, and explanations, followed each other with a rapidity that took Daisy's breath away. Then the visitor ran back to the gate, to superintend the dislodging of her luggage. Her "large box," as she called it (it was indeed large!), had been secured behind the vehicle in some wonderful and ingenious manner, and was now the subject of animated dispute between her and the driver.

Daisy had a gardener, but he was old and crippled; Mr. Stewart assisted the fly-man in getting the "large box" through the garden-gate, and up the garden-path. In her excitement concerning her luggage, Miss Brown had not yet paid that attention to Mr. Stewart which any man, as a man, generally received from her; she had jumped at the conclusion that he was Aunt Daisy's "butler, or something," and Daisy was both mortified and amused to notice that she addressed and directed him with the same mixture of familiarity and imperious command she used towards the fly-driver.

"You can't think how glad I am to see a prospect of getting something to eat, Aunt Daisy; I'm most uncommonly hungry," was Miss Brown's remark, as they went into the breakfast-room.

She dashed off her hat, and ran her fingers over her most picturesque dishevelment of hair, and then, putting her hands

patronisingly on Daisy's shoulders, she said,

"Why, what a little young thing you look! I expected to see a gaunt old maid. Of course, if I had thought, I might have known that you could not be old; but thinking is a folly that I'm not often guilty of, Aunt Daisy."

Then she turned her attention upon Mr. Stewart, whose easy attitude and amused smile had shown her he was not a servant. The air with which she regarded him would have been supercilious if her regard had been turned upon a woman; but no man was held by Miss Brown as quite unworthy some amount of complaisance.

"You have not done me the honour of introducing me to your niece," Mr. Stewart said to Daisy.

Daisy went through the ceremony.

"I'm sure I beg Mr. Stewart's pardon. In the bustle and confusion about that ridiculous big box—which I hope, by-the-by, hasn't terribly alarmed you as to the

proposed length of my stay, Aunt Daisy,—I took Mr. Stewart for your butler. I didn't look at him, mind you. I hope you aren't offended, Mr. Stewart?"

"Not in the least, Miss Brown; I should feel honoured to serve your aunt in any capacity."

"That is very pretty, I'm sure, Aunt Daisy."

Here Daisy said a few words, explaining that she had only just had her niece's letter; that, therefore, nothing was prepared for her.

"Don't mind me, Aunt Daisy; I don't want to be made a stranger of; there was no need for preparation," Miss Brown was so good as to say.

Daisy left the room to give some hasty instructions to her servants. When she came back she found Myrrha chattering away to Mr. Stewart, questioning him about the neighbourhood, and telling him of her journey; talking to him as a familiar friend.

It seemed she had come from no further than London, where she had been staying some time.

"Mr. Stewart is just going to take me round the garden, Aunt Daisy; I suppose he may; he seems quite at home here."

Myrrha's glance was saucy and investigating. This was a case of old maid and old bachelor courtship, she decided; she thought that, possibly, some "distraction," some "fun," might be got out of interfering with it, if there should seem to be great dearth of amusement in the place. Besides, in Mr. Stewart's expression there was something that provoked her to wish to add him to the number of her "conquests;" he looked "stuck-up," she thought, and his regard of her seemed to have in it more of curiosity and criticism than of admiration, as yet! After going outside with Mr. Stewart, Myrrha dashed back to say to Daisy,

"Is he your doctor, your parson, or your lawyer, Aunt Daisy? I ask that I

may know what to talk to him about."

"He is neither."

"What, besides you, is he much interested in?"

"He is interested in most things. He is fond of gardening, for instance."

"Dear me, and I don't know much about it. How unfortunate; but then I can ask him to teach me." And she danced down the garden-path to where Mr. Stewart was waiting for her.

Daisy's chief servant and manager, who had been her cousin's more than servant all her suffering life, having just encountered Myrrha, as she came in to rearrange the breakfast-table, stood aghast.

"Well, ma'am, I never; do tell now, is that how all the young creatures are done up in her country?"

"She's an English girl, Mrs. Moss, though I don't think she has lived much in England."

Mrs. Moss, still gazing after Myrrha,

catalogued the peculiarities with which she was most struck.

"Half her hair right a-top of her head, the rest trailing down her back; no gown to speak of, nothing in one piece, all flounces and furbelows, petticoats puffed out behind, such stockings, and shows 'em pretty well, too! Law, ma'am, it's queer. I shouldn't like to see her in a very high wind; it appears to me her clothes would soon be flying off her." Then Mrs. Moss turned from the window, and attended to her own business.

The breakfast, for which Myrrha had professed herself so hungry, had time to be perfectly ready, and to get almost cold before they came into the house.

Myrrha had found a cluster of early apple-blossom, had broken it off, and stuck it in her hair.

She came and knelt down before Daisy.

"Does it do well there, Aunt Daisy? I know it does, though I haven't looked in the

glass. Mr. Stewart seemed to grudge my picking it. Do you grudge it me, Aunt Daisy? I always wear flowers in my hair when I'm in reach of them. Roses suit me best, I think, wild-roses, or white garden-roses. Oh! I know what would become me better than this." She pulled out the apple-blossom and threw it on the table, and, making a dash out-doors, picked two or three purple wind-flowers.

"There, they bring out the yellow in my hair, don't they?"

"But then," Mr. Stewart objected, "they take the purple out of your eyes." At that she made a pouting grimace.

While she was outside, Mr. Stewart had said to Daisy:

"She has been trying very cleverly to find out who I am. She evidently can't accept me as just a gentleman—I mean as quite, in her sense, a gentleman. First she assumed me to be an artist, then an author; don't enlighten her, Daisy!"

"Now," said Daisy, "Mrs. Moss will be in despair if you don't do justice to the breakfast."

"Shan't I just do justice to it! I expect to astonish you, Aunt Daisy. I'm not one of those ethereal beings who can exist without mortal sustenance. Won't you call it lunch, and take something, Mr. Stewart? I'm really very hungry, and shall be ashamed to eat half I wish to eat if I have to eat alone."

Finding everything "delicious" and "lovely" — cream, butter, bread, honey, chicken, ham, coffee, preserves — Myrrha ate and talked rapidly and largely, but managed, too, to do nothing ungracefully.

"Do you ride, Miss Brown?" Mr. Stewart asked, when Myrrha had been questioning him about the stretch of uplands visible from the window, asking whether there was good turf there.

"Always, when I can get anything to

carry me. Have you any horses, Aunt Daisy?"

"No, your aunt has no horses."

"You don't keep anything a lady could ride, I suppose, Mr. Stewart?"

"Well, I can generally procure the use of a lady's hack when I wish."

"Oh, Mr. Stewart, I don't know what I won't do for you if you manage to get me some nice rides!"

"Bribed in such a splendidly indefinite manner, you may depend upon my exerting myself." And now Mr. Stewart took his departure, saying, "I must indulge in no more of this pleasant idleness, or I shall get into disgrace."

"With whom?" Myrrha asked, inquisitively.

"With my master."

"Who is he? Who is your master?"

"Ask your Aunt Daisy."

To Myrrha's question Daisy only answer-

ed: "I should think Mr. Stewart is pretty much his own master."

Miss Brown, breakfast over, and Mr. Stewart gone, suffered a temporary collapse. She threw herself into an easy-chair, and yawned. She was silent, and looked quite thoughtful, for perhaps five minutes.

"After all," she said, "travelling at night does use one up, rather. I daresay you wonder why I did travel by night, Aunt Daisy? The truth is, I had to leave where I was, suddenly; the place got too hot to hold me. Can I help it, Aunt Daisy, if men will fall in love with me? And yet I'm always treated as if the fault was entirely mine."

"Were you staying with friends in London when this misfortune happened to you?"

"Yes, Aunt Daisy—at least, I may as well be frank with you—I was expected to talk French to the young people. You understand, I was not a governess, or a

companion; it was a sort of 'mutual accommodation' arrangement."

"Oh, yes, I understand."

Myrrha yawned.

"Would you like to lie down and sleep a little?" asked Daisy. "I don't think your own room can be quite ready; but won't you go to mine?"

"Presently, Aunt Daisy. Aunt Daisy, do you think he meant it about the rides?"

"Mr. Stewart generally means what he says."

"But is he a person who can spare the time?"

"I suppose he thinks he can."

"Then," with sudden animation, "I must rout out my habit and see into the state of it. I haven't worn it very lately. I'm afraid it will be in an awful tumble; my things were so horribly ill-packed . . . . Aunt Daisy, what a charming place you have here! It's a very small house, certainly; but then everything is so pretty. I

made Mr. Stewart take me all over the garden, the orchard, and the meadow. Do you know, Aunt Daisy, I like Mr. Stewart uncommonly, though he is so queer-looking. Couldn't he afford to dress a little better? I hope he will when he takes me for those rides. All his clothes look so rough. It's a pity he shouldn't dress a little better, for he seems almost a gentleman."

"Mr. Stewart is quite a gentleman."

"Oh, of course, in one sense,"—suppressing a yawn; "but I meant conventionally speaking. Do you think he likes me, Aunt Daisy? I generally know directly whether people like me or not; but he puzzled me a little: once or twice I fancied he was laughing at me. Do you think he admired me?"

"I fancy, Myrrha, you are tolerably well aware that you are a pretty creature whom all men admire. As to liking—I don't suppose Mr. Stewart likes or dislikes you

yet. He's not quick in his likes and dislikes."

"Most men do admire me, certainly; but not quite all. Shall you like me, Aunt Daisy? If so, I might stop with you always—at least, I mean, till I marry—that would be awfully jolly. Do you know, Aunt Daisy, I'm not quite sure I will marry. It must be, in so many ways, an awful bore. If I could keep always young and pretty, I'm sure I never would; but when one gets old"—she was now leaning forward, elbows on knees, and quite in earnest—"when one gets to be neglected, and called an 'old maid,' and all that; well, I suppose, that is not pleasant, Aunt Daisy, and that then one begins to wish for the dignity and position of a married woman. So, on the whole, I suppose I had better marry, by-and-by; don't you think so, Aunt Daisy?"

"It is generally considered (marriage, I mean) the more desirable estate!"

"But there's no hurry, is there, Aunt

Daisy? I don't mean to marry very young; I mean to enjoy myself while I am young—amuse myself. One of the chief reasons why I came away from home was to escape from my lovers (I got into the same sort of mess in London, but I could not help it). I'm the youngest, you know, of the girls at home, and the only pretty one, and it really isn't fair to Jean and Julia that I, who don't mean to marry for a long time to come, should have all the men at my feet, while they, poor girls, who do want to marry—who are in a dreadful hurry to marry—are neglected. They're ever so much older than I am, you know; there were half a dozen or more, boys, between. It's very hard for them, and trying to their tempers, and makes their poor noses get red. I'm always so sorry for people who are ugly, Aunt Daisy; so I thought it only kind to start on my travels, and try to find a home. I made mamma come out strong on my toilettes; I thought

that only fair; I've got some that will quite charm you. That old woman in London had the impudence to tell me my dress was quite unsuitable to my position! I don't want to marry a Frenchman, or an American, Aunt Daisy, and the English one meets abroad are such a scrubby set. I tell you what I should like of all things, an English country gentleman with a house in town. I'd be the queen of a county, set the fashions, and all that. And I'd be good to the poor and—have you a headache, Aunt Daisy? Ah! you are not used to such a rattle; but I shall do you a world of good. I'm a little dull and tired to-day, but when I'm rested and in good spirits, I shall keep you amused. You'll laugh more in ten days of my being with you than you've done for the last ten years of your life. You have such a sad, grave look, Aunt Daisy, you seem quite to have forgotten that you're not old yet; and you seem to wish other people to forget it, or you

wouldn't dress and do your hair in such old-fashioned style! What nice hair you have, Aunt Daisy! I wish you'd let me dress it as I do mine. Mr. Stewart says mine is a happy mixture of the fashionable and the picturesque! You'd be surprised at the lot of compliments I got out of him. I had to work hard for them, though! Yes, I like him, Aunt Daisy, and I mean he shall like me."

"I don't suppose he will find any difficulty in liking you, or will need any making. But if it were not his will and pleasure to like you, I don't think you would find it easy to bend him to your will and pleasure as you have, I suppose, been in the habit of doing with younger and more frivolous-natured men."

"I assure you it is not only by young and frivolous men I have been admired, but also by men quite old and very learned. I don't think I should find Mr. Stewart

difficult to subdue, if I set my will to doing it."

"What age are you, Myrrha?"

"Just past nineteen, Aunt Daisy."

"And not engaged, as I gather from your talk."

"Not exactly engaged."

"And you have never been in love?"

"Not exactly, but——"

"What does 'not exactly' mean?"

"It means, Aunt Daisy, that I am wiser than you think me. The fact is, there are so many of them——"

"So many with whom you are almost in love, to whom you are 'not exactly' engaged?"

"There are so many of them in love with me, I mean. And there is more than one with whom I have felt I might fall in love, if I didn't take care. I know I ought to be a rich man's wife. I wished to see what I I could do in England before committing

myself to anyone—so I ran away. Wasn't that wise?"

"Quite wise."

"Aunt Daisy, I'm afraid your headache is getting much worse. Now, do lie down, and let me take care of you. Let me bathe your forehead with eau-de-cologne. You don't like eau-de-cologne? How strange! What do you do when you have a bad headache?"

"Keep quiet. Nothing more."

"Perhaps I've tired you, as you're not used to me; but I know I shall do you a great deal of good in the end. Do you think my room is ready? Because, if so, I should like to unpack some of my things, and to change my dress. Which of the servants can help me?"

"Not either very well this morning. I have only two; Mrs. Moss, who is housekeeper and manager, and a young girl, Jane. Jane can help you in the afternoon. What help you need now I must give you."

"Of course, Aunt Daisy, I couldn't think of troubling you." Then, with a blank look, "If you have so few servants, Aunt Daisy, who will do my needlework?"

"There's a very fair seamstress in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, horror!—a country seamstress! By my needlework, I don't mean making linen—that wouldn't matter. I mean little tasteful things—putting on laces, and running on ribbons, and altering trimmings, and that sort of thing."

"Can't you do those yourself?"

"I've never tried."

"Suppose you marry a poor man?"

"Aunt Daisy, I'm not a fool."

"I know, my dear, you don't mean to do that, if you can help it; but if you should be so unhappy as to love a man who was not rich?"

"I shouldn't marry him; but I don't believe in falling in love against one's will and conviction. My mind is, I hope, too well

regulated for there to be any danger of my doing that." She said this standing, hat in hand, very erect, full of the sense of her own dignity and wisdom, the pretty gleeful eyes fired with resolve.

"She *is* pretty," thought Daisy, as she admired the flower-like set of the head on its slender white stalk, the slight, gracious figure, the lovely colouring. "Such a child, too, and evidently so badly brought up. There is no hidden harm in her, I should say; all the folly and worldliness are outspoken. I wonder if we can be of any use to her—Kenneth and I? Kenneth, if he got influence over her, might improve her." A heavy sigh. "How could I hope to improve anyone? Let her be vain and worldly as she may, she must still be a more true and innocent creature than I am!"

CHAPTER IV.

MYRRHA, coming down to breakfast next morning, in the most charming of morning dresses, announced that she felt "Quite settled now, Aunt Daisy—quite at home." To prove which she insisted upon taking Daisy's place at the table, "to save Aunt Daisy trouble."

"You'll find me very useful, Aunt Daisy, in ever so many ways; though, seeing me so ornamental, I don't suppose you expect it."

After breakfast, she said the flowers in the vases were faded, and she would pick others. "Arranging flowers is one of the accomplishments on which I pride myself, Aunt Daisy."

When this was finished—it occupied some time, and was done with much fuss, and many flittings in and out, and to and fro—she audibly wondered how soon Mr. Stewart would fulfil his promise about bringing her a horse; this reminded her to go and look up all the et ceteras of riding-costume—hat, gloves, cravat, and whip.

She soon reappeared, laden with music.

"Is your piano in good tune, Aunt Daisy?"

"I hardly know, dear."

"I conclude Mr. Stewart is a Scotchman, Aunt Daisy, so I've been hunting out all my Scotch songs—preparing to fascinate him by singing them. Is he fond of music, Aunt Daisy? Does he ever come here of an evening? Does he like vocal or instrumental music best? What style of music?—classical or romantic? Do you play and sing, Aunt Daisy?"

"Which of your questions shall I answer first?"

"You think me a sad rattle, don't you, Aunt Daisy? But you'll soon get to like my rattle. I'm always the life and light of any house I'm in. At home, you see, Aunt Daisy, I was too bright a light; I threw Jean and Julia, poor old dears, so grievously into the shade."

Trying the piano, she pronounced it very tolerable, but got up from it almost immediately.

"I think I shall go out and make a sketch of the cottage; I'm very fond of sketching, and I think I may say I'm rather clever at it. Perhaps, after lunch, you'll take me for a good long walk. I suppose it is no use hoping that Mr. Stewart will take me for a ride this first day—is it, Aunt Daisy?"

"Of course it is just possible, but not probable. Most likely the horse he intends for your riding will require some exercising first."

"I can ride anything, Aunt Daisy, so I

hope he won't reduce the animal to an uninteresting state of quietness."

Myrrha arranged herself in a something she called a hat, and in a coquettish jacket, and then went out "to sketch." So Daisy, who found that continual repetition of "Aunt Daisy" somewhat trying to her unaccustomed nerves, had quiet breathing-time.

After lunch, which was in reality dinner, Daisy took her visitor for a walk. She found that "a walk," with Myrrha, meant no mere stroll of a mile or so, but two or three hours of good, brisk, uninterrupted walking—"over the hills and far away." Not exactly, however, on Myrrha's part, uninterrupted, as she broke the monotony of walking by running races with Daisy's large dog. Daisy had no idea she could have borne such a walk. The truth was, she was amused—distracted from the consciousness of the weight and burden of her own existence. The contact with Myrrha's frivolity, exuberant youth, and gay super-

ficiality, did her good. When they came home they took a cup of tea; then Daisy went to lie down in her own room, and Myrrha went "to dress."

"I wonder if I shall be able to get fond of her," Daisy thought. "She is so pretty, but—the pretty eyes are so untrustworthy. I wonder how Kenneth will like her. I should think he won't be able to help admiring her. The miniature he spoke of so warmly couldn't represent a lovelier face than Myrrha's." And here Daisy sighed.

"I like your way of living, uncommonly, Aunt Daisy," was Myrrha's comment on the delicately-appointed tea-table to which they sat down about seven o'clock. "I suppose it wouldn't suit a man; they always seem bent on late dinners," she went on. "I suppose Mr. Stewart dines late. I forget if you said he did come sometimes in the evening? I am longing to see him again. Perhaps he may look in this evening, just to tell me when I may expect a ride?"

"It is quite possible he may."

But he did not. Myrrha's spirits drooped; she seemed to find the evening dull, and she went to bed very early, regretting that she had been at the trouble of putting on one of her prettiest dresses.

The next day was wet, and Myrrha felt it hang on hand somewhat heavily; she spread some of her pretty "costumes" out in her room for the admiration of Daisy, of Mrs. Moss, and of Jane; but this was not very exciting. The day dragged.

When Mr. Stewart, in spite of the rain, came to the cottage that evening, Myrrha's reception of him showed him that he was a most welcome apparition.

"Is this intended in an offensive sense?" he asked, when Myrrha crossed the room to him, carrying him a cup of tea. "I inquire because this is the sort of attention paid by charming young ladies to elderly uncles."

"You enlighten me, Mr. Stewart. I didn't

know, though I may have fancied, I had that happiness to hope for—of having you for my uncle. When is it to be?"

"You are a saucy-tongued young lady; and your sauciness was not apt. If I had meant any such allusion, should I have used the word 'offensive'?"

He turned to the open, music-littered piano.

"You are prepared to entertain me, I see, and I am prepared to be entertained."

"Do you really like music?"

"I really like music; but then I may have ideas of my own as to what I call music."

"Oh, I shall be sure to be able to find something to please you, for I do a little in all styles; so I will try you with a variety."

She played first a weird valse by Chopin; she rattled it off brilliantly, with very creditable, though not flawless, execution.

"I know beforehand that that is neither

your style nor Aunt Daisy's, Mr. Stewart," Myrrha said, as she twirled herself round on the music-stool to investigate her auditors.

"It is a good beginning, at all events, Miss Brown; it gives us an opportunity of judging the mechanical part of your talent."

"Dear me, you'll make me nervous! If I think I am to be listened to in such a judicial and critical spirit, I shan't do myself half justice."

"Do you then prefer ignorant applause to enlightened criticism?"

"I don't see why you should take for granted that the applause can only come from the ignorant, and from the enlightened only criticism. Well, I'm going now to play you something in quite a different style."

She played a sonata of Mozart's: when she ended she turned to look at Mr. Stewart, prepared to receive his compliments tri-

umphantly: Mr. Stewart gravely shook his head.

"What does that mean, Mr. Stewart?" Myrrha asked, with wondering eyes.

"Am I to speak frankly, Miss Brown?"

"Of course." But already the tone was pettish and the face cloudy.

"I think that performance was a signal failure. It seems to me you fail entirely in catching and rendering the Mozartism of Mozart, the tender grace, the——"

"Oh! pardon," exclaimed Myrrha, elevating her pretty brows. "I had no notion I was playing to an enthusiast. To tell the truth, I don't so much care about 'understanding' a composer. I like to make his music say what I please, not just slavishly to say what he pleases!"

"Then of course you set yourself beyond the pale of criticism. But you should have prepared us beforehand for what was coming; should have told us that we were not going to listen to Mozart played by

Miss Brown, but to Miss Brown playing Mozart."

Myrrha eyed Mr. Stewart somewhat long and largely.

"I shan't play to you any more to-night. I shall try if my singing suits you better."

She sang half a dozen of what she considered her best songs, one after the other, in rapid succession, giving no time for criticism, and feeling confident that now, at last, she was dazzling her listeners.

There was something so frank in the way her face expressed that confidence when she ceased and turned round, that Mr. Stewart, both touched and amused, gave her all the praise he could honestly bestow. He praised the possibilities of her voice, which was a fine contralto, and remarked that, with diligent study and good instruction, he thought she would, one day, sing very finely.

"'Diligent study! good instruction'!" Myrrha echoed, amazedly. "Why, I've

practised ever so many hours a day, for ever so many years, and I've had lessons from a prima donna! It must be that this room is so wretchedly low for singing—then the piano is out of tune, and I think I've got a slight cold. But, Mr. Stewart," she demanded, after a sullen pause, "what can make you think I want good instruction?"

"Well, it seemed to me that you had not mastered the very elements of good singing—did not know how properly to bring out your fine voice."

"Are you a music-master?" Myrrha asked, rudely. "Perhaps you will give me the 'good instruction' of which you think I am so much in need?"

"I fear I must not have that honour."

After that answer Mr. Stewart talked entirely to Daisy.

Myrrha, drooping her pretty head dejectedly, threw herself on a sofa; there she sat, sullen and silent, for perhaps a quarter

of an hour; then got up, and said "Good night!"

Mr. Stewart lighted her candle; as he held it to her he brightened her whole being again, by asking at what time to-morrow she would like to ride, should the day be fine, as he thought it promised to be.

"That's the cleverest way of winning my forgiveness!" she said. "But, Mr. Stewart, if you don't like my riding any better than you like my playing, my singing, and, perhaps I may add, myself——"

"Anyone light and graceful as you are, and, I should say, with plenty of the rash courage of ignorance, can't help riding well."

"Thank you for nothing, Mr. Stewart," she answered, dropping him a deep curtsey.

"Did Mr. Stewart stay long after I went to bed?" Myrrha asked next morning, with assumed carelessness.

"About five minutes."

"Aunt Daisy,—if you think the question

impertinent, I hope you'll forgive me for asking it,—are you engaged to Mr. Stewart?"

"No, Myrrha." Poor Daisy blushed painfully.

"You seem so very intimate, and he seems so perfectly at home in your house, it was a natural question to ask, Aunt Daisy."

"We are very old friends."

"I conclude he hasn't a wife, or he wouldn't be so free to come and go."

"He has no wife."

"Is he a widower?"

"I have never heard of his having married."

"And he is not your lover, only your friend, you think?"

To this Daisy made no answer; she thought the girl impertinent. But Myrrha had not done, and was not to be repressed by Daisy's grave silence.

"Aunt Daisy, he is more than your friend." She spoke with her worldly-wise

look. "Indeed, I do believe there is no such thing as 'only friendship' possible between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. And, indeed, why should there be only friendship? Why, for instance, should you two, who are such good friends, not marry? Possibly Mr. Stewart is not quite as good a match as you once hoped to make, Aunt Daisy; but we don't keep young for ever. When I am as old as you are, if I am still single, I shall seriously set about getting married."

"I do not think of marrying," answered Daisy, coldly.

"And does Mr. Stewart also not think of marrying?"

"You must question him on that head yourself, if your audacity is equal to it."

"I will, perhaps, by-and-by, when I know him a little better. This morning I am going to question him about my drawing. I think he will admit I have talent for that."

When Mr. Stewart came, Myrrha, most prettily got up in a riding-dress, was in the garden, touching up a sketch of the cottage she had made the day before yesterday.

"I think I have taken it from the best point of view, Mr. Stewart. Don't you think so?" she asked, with winning humility. "Now, tell me what you really think."

He had tied his own horse to the garden-gate, and ordered the other to be led up and down. He took her sketching-block in his hands.

"Do you, Miss Brown, really wish to know what I really think? You said so about your music, and yet I had the misfortune to offend you."

"Of course I do," she pouted.

"The point of view is not a bad one, but the drawing is bad." Then he went on to show her, bit by bit, how everything was wrong, light and shade, perspective, everything; ending by saying, "I should think

you have some facility, but you have had no teaching, or worse than none. You are hasty, superficial, consequently untruthful."

"Mr. Stewart, what a terrible pedant you are! I am wondering," she said, looking into his face, with an audacious look, not free from spite, "whether you have been longest a music-master or a drawing-master. I am sure you must have been both."

At that moment the perfectly-appointed and handsome mare intended for her riding came in sight. This changed her mood; she could not afford to quarrel with the provider of such pleasure as she promised herself from these rides; so she looked up into his face again, this time with a look meant to be bewitchingly sweet, and asked,

"At any rate, will you be my master?"

"We will see what can be done for you. If I were your father, or guardian, I would certainly take care that you had a couple of years' thorough teaching."

"I have no father, you see, and no guardian. If you will be so good as to help me——"

"We will see, we will see. Where is your aunt?" His eyes had been scanning the windows.

"I don't know."

"I will go and find her. I have a word to say to her before we start."

"I daresay you have," muttered Myrrha, looking after him displeasedly. "To be neglected for an old maid like Aunt Daisy! I suppose she has money. Heigho! What would I not give to be rich!"

Mr. Stewart thought Daisy looking worried.

"Are you tired of her? Does she weary you?"

"I ought not to mind. She is very good-natured."

"When she is pleased."

"She certainly has the womanly virtue of wishing to please."

"It is a virtue in a woman to wish to please those worth pleasing."

"I suppose some women think everybody worth pleasing."

"Every man," corrected Mr. Stewart. "And that is nearer vice than virtue, in my eyes."

Daisy walked with him to the gate, and there they found Myrrha, leaning against the paling, engaged in easy and laughing conversation with the groom. Mr. Stewart gave an amused, and annoyed, glance at Daisy.

The riders were so long absent that Daisy grew anxious.

Myrrha had boasted that she could ride anything, but Daisy had already known her long enough not to pay much attention to her statements. When at last she heard the sound of horses' feet, she went hurriedly to the gate.

"Mr. Stewart is afraid you will have been alarmed, Aunt Daisy. I hope he is wrong.

We have had the most delicious ride. Mr. Stewart is a darling to get me such a delightful horse. I shall love him for ever, as the children say!"

"Nothing has gone wrong, then?"

"Not with us," Mr. Stewart, gazing into the grave pale face, answered.

Myrrha was looking radiant, and, in a certain way, as lovely as a creature could look.

"I needn't ask if you are tired, Myrrha?" Daisy said.

"Tired! No, Aunt Daisy." And as Mr. Stewart lifted her to the ground she looked more than half inclined to kiss him in the exuberance of her spirits. "He says he will stay for our tea instead of going home to dinner, if you will let him, Aunt Daisy. I'll run in and dress directly, for, in spite of the lunch we had, I'm very hungry."

Daisy stayed in the garden with Mr. Stewart till Myrrha joined them.

"Tea is quite ready, and everything looks so nice. And don't I look nice too, Aunt Daisy?"

The question of the tongue was for Aunt Daisy; the question of the eyes for Mr. Stewart.

"Indeed, you do, dear. But is it safe for you, Myrrha, warm from your ride, to come out-doors so lightly dressed? It is not Summer yet."

"But it is as warm as Summer, Aunt Daisy."

She was, openly and undisguisedly, standing to be admired. The frankness of her vanity gave it a kind of charm, making it seem childlike and innocent. She looked much more than pretty—a most bright creature, and of a most delicate brightness. She held a perfect rosebud in her hand.

"Mr. Stewart," she said, "in grateful recognition of the pleasures of the ride past, and grateful anticipation of rides to be, I forgive you the many hard raps on the

knuckles you've given me. I offer you this," holding the rosebud to him, "as a flag of truce."

"I will do your gift the highest honour in my power, Miss Brown."

He took it from Myrrha, and gave it to Daisy.

In a moment the glee darkened out of Myrrha's eyes, but only for a moment. Exhilarated by her ride, she was in spirits too high to let sullenness be possible.

While they were at tea, Myrrha said—

"Aunt Daisy, in coming home we made a round that brought us through some grounds, belonging to a most charming old red-brick manor-house. What's the mystery about that house? Mr. Stewart wouldn't tell me to whom it belonged, or answer any of my questions."

"How could we tell the owner was not in hearing, behind some of those great beech-trunks? It would hardly have been in good taste to speak disparagingly of a

man, while trespassing upon his property."

"Should you have had to speak disparagingly of him?"

"If I'd spoken as I think."

"What house is it?" Daisy asked Mr. Stewart.

"Redcombe."

"Oh!"

Myrrha, who was very quick, caught a particular expression in the eyes of Daisy and of Mr. Stewart, which made her sure there was some mystery in the matter A suspicion of the truth flashed across her. Surely, Mr. Stewart, whom she had called a pedant, and accused of being a music-master or a drawing-master, or both, could not be master of that fine old place, owner of those beautiful grounds! The suspicion made her heart beat faster, but she took good care to show nothing of it. She began to cross-question him.

"Is the owner of Redcombe young or old?"

"What you would call middle-aged, and incline to think venerable."

"About what age?"

"Well, I should say, not much older, or much younger than I am."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"Do you like him?"

"Immensely sometimes; sometimes I find him the most dreadful bore."

"Which should I do? Like him immensely, or find him the most dreadful bore?"

"I would not venture to prophesy—rather the latter than the former I should, however, imagine."

"I think," said Myrrha, with a meditative air, and her eyes fixed full on Mr. Stewart, "that I should like him immensely."

"He would indeed be a fortunate man were that the case; but what makes you think you would like him?"

"To begin with, I generally like men

about the age you describe him to be, so much better than younger men."

"I described him to be about my age."

"Yes. At that age one knows what a man is. He is not likely to turn out much better or much worse than one finds him. He is trustworthy, too. One can look up to him and feel confidence in him."

"It is a fortunate age, Miss Brown, if it inspires such sentiments in so charming a creature as yourself."

"You don't think me charming, I know. I wonder if the owner of Redcombe would!"

"May I ask what, besides his age, disposes you favourably towards the possessor of Redcombe?"

"I'll give you a frank answer, Mr. Stewart—his being the possessor of Redcombe."

"I like frankness."

"I'm glad you find some one thing in me to like—I like to be liked."

"No doubt you do."

"Do you find anything reprehensible in that?"

"Certainly not—it is an admirable quality; but whether it is more or less admirable depends upon the motives and the manner of its manifestation."

"You can never say anything in my favour without nullifying qualifications, implied if not spoken. I wonder what you really think of me?"

"You take for granted I do really think about you?"

Myrrha coloured delicately, but very perceptibly, a pink shade tinging both her face and neck.

"Aunt Daisy, I'll tell you what I think of Mr. Stewart. I think of all the men I have ever encountered he is the least chivalrous, not to say the most uncourteous."

"And of the men I know, Myrrha, he is the most chivalrous."

"I pity your unfortunate experience of

men, then, Aunt Daisy. Possibly Mr. Stewart can be chivalrous and courteous to one woman, but that is not the characteristic of chivalry."

"Quite true," assented Mr. Stewart.

After a few minutes Myrrha resumed her cross-examination.

"Is there a croquet-lawn at Redcombe, Mr. Stewart? Does the mysterious owner, whom you and Aunt Daisy seem to wish should be nameless, give garden-parties?"

"A croquet-lawn!" repeated Mr. Stewart, reflectively. "I should think not. Redcombe is a very old-fashioned place, and I have not heard of any modern improvements. No, I should say there is not a croquet-lawn. Neither, to my knowledge, are garden-parties known at Redcombe. But you see, Miss Brown, all this is easily changed. Of course the owner of Redcombe would only need to know that Miss Brown desired these things in order to institute them."

"You are chaffing me, Mr. Stewart. I suppose he isn't even a calling acquaintance of Aunt Daisy's—I haven't heard of Aunt Daisy's having one single acquaintance except you, Mr. Stewart. So of course you're only chaffing me."

"Let me see, chaffing you means amusing myself at your expense, doesn't it, Miss Brown?"

"You know it does."

"Well, I was hardly doing that. It isn't likely that the owner of Redcombe is as unchivalrous and uncourteous as you find me; and if he is not, why then, surely, my prophecy about him is not an unsafe one."

"Is he at home just now?"

"That depends in what sense you use the words 'at home'—he is in England."

Myrrha would not further pursue her inquiries; having finished her tea, she went to the piano and began to play softly in the twilight. She seemed dreamily absorbed in

the dreamy music; but she kept a sharp sidelong watch on her Aunt Daisy's low chair in the window, over which Mr. Stewart was bending—till, by-and-by, he came to her side. Daisy, rising noiselessly, left the room, and strayed into the garden.

It was intolerable! What was? The fragrance and beauty of the evening, and the jubilant singing of that thrush.

Meanwhile, Myrrha tried a little sentimental flirtation. Letting her soft music almost die away, she sighed a great sigh.

"I daresay you think me a very frivolous girl, Mr. Stewart?"

"You are very young, Miss Brown; you have time to improve."

"All the circumstances of my life have been against me. I have always lived with frivolous and worldly people. Of course it would have been very vain of me to encourage myself to be different from everybody about me."

"Are you not vain?" he asked, with sur-

prise that there should be room for question on this point.

"I don't really think I am very vain at heart."

"I wonder if you are right or not?"

There was a pause; then Myrrha said,

"I hope, Mr. Stewart, you don't think me ill-tempered. Indeed, it is trying to be treated as you treat me: especially trying to me, who have never had any experience of the kind."

"How do I treat you?"

"You snub me—that is, you're always saying hard things. It is good for me. I don't wish you to do anything different. I may come to like it, but it is the first time I have been treated in this way; and to be treated first in this way by one whose good opinion and admiration one feels to be worth having, is rather trying, you must admit; so, if I seem rather ill-tempered under it, you must make excuses for me."

Myrrha dashed her handkerchief across

her eyes. They were moist with the earnestness with which she had spoken; for certainly her feelings had been a good deal wounded.

Mr. Stewart did not speak immediately. Presently he said,

"Miss Brown, you bring a grave charge against me. I must have been monstrously impertinent. In my own defence I must say that I believe I could hardly have transgressed in the manner you indicate, had you yourself not invited the criticism you have found it hard to bear."

"I did invite it—I wished for it. I could never feel you impertinent, however cruel I might think you. I hope you will continue to criticise me. I feel you may do me so much good."

"The post of Mentor to a young and lovely lady is one of danger, Miss Brown. I am too old and wary voluntarily to enter the enchanted net I see so daintily spread for me. There is your Aunt Daisy—for

counsel, for encouragement, for example, what more, or better, or different can you require?"

"Aunt Daisy," said Myrrha, with a peculiar expression, "is—Aunt Daisy. To begin with, she has had no general experience of life to entitle her to speak with authority; to go on with, hers is not an example I should wish to imitate. I am not naturally morbid—I don't wish to become so. I wish mine to be a bright, wholesome, practical existence. To end with, I know that I need to be governed by a man's will, scourged by a man's censure, stimulated by a man's praise. I have never been amenable to petticoat government."

He thought the eyes with which she looked at him, saying this, splendidly audacious.

"I don't think you should be proud of that concluding confession, Miss Brown. I have always specially liked to see young girls render docile and reverent submission

to women. I have noticed this docility, as girls, in some of the most admirable women I have known. I have noticed, too, that often girls who profess extreme docility to masculine guidance, and submission to masculine judgment, really desire only masculine admiration, and, when married, sometimes make rebellious and headstrong wives."

Mr. Stewart had been stung by the half-contemptuous tone in which Myrrha spoke of Daisy, and his own tone was harsh. There was a pause; then Myrrha said, softly and sighingly through the dusk,

"I am very unfortunate, Mr. Stewart; all I say and do seems to provoke your dislike."

"Dislike of some things you say and do need not imply dislike of yourself, Miss Brown."

"Perhaps, Mr. Stewart, I should feel less as if it did imply that dislike if you wouldn't call me always by my hideous

common name, 'Miss Brown.' If you would call me 'Myrrha,' the hard things you say wouldn't seem quite so hard."

"But, possibly, I don't wish them to be less forcible."

"Won't you call me Myrrha? I'm such a child to you—there can be no harm. Why, I suppose you are old enough to be my father, almost. Promise that you will call me Myrrha when you are not angry with me—do, Mr. Stewart." And she laid her hand coaxingly on his arm.

"By-and-by we will see about it; at present we are very recent acquaintances."

"I don't feel as if we were; and you don't treat me as if we were, when you wish to scold me—to be unkind."

"I think we agreed that your condescension, not my presumption, was answerable for any transgressions of mine?"

"There is no condescension, no presumption, no transgression; but if there is any blame, it is mine."

"That is a very generous statement, Miss Brown."

"Won't you reward it by a generous concession, and call me Myrrha?"

"Will you, Myrrha, accept from me, *àpropos* of condescension and presumption, a brotherly—fatherly, if you prefer it—hint on a very delicate subject?"

"Anything that you say to Myrrha, and not to Miss Brown, will be listened to patiently."

"I was shocked to-day by my groom's manner towards you, Myrrha—its half-jocose familiarity. I shall blow him up, and he will excuse himself by saying something about the young lady's 'condescension.' You don't exactly understand English usages, I fancy; and English servants don't understand American liberty of manner. An English young lady who leaned against a paling, slashing herself with her whip, and laughing and talking freely with a groom, would be considered—well—ob-

jectionably fast—not well-conducted—not anything you would wish to be considered."

Myrrha put her hands up to her face, though the dusk would alone have sufficed to hide her blushes, or the absence of them.

"Oh, Mr. Stewart," she said, "thank you a thousand times."

"Thank you, Myrrha, for taking my warning in such good part."

"I hope you may find that I shall always take in good part anything you may say to me."

"I may not have many opportunities of trying you."

"Oh, Mr. Stewart!" in very genuine consternation, "I hope you don't mean you are going away?"

"There is a possibility that business may take me from the neighbourhood. You are alarmed at the prospect of losing your rides?"

"At that—and many other things."

"I could secure you the rides, and the attendance of a careful old servant."

"Then, of course, I should not regret you."

"Of course you would not. You would have the physical enjoyment without the metaphysical annoyance."

"Mr. Stewart, you are hoping I shall say something pretty and flattering."

"Am I?"

"Yes. Not because you care for what I say, but because men always care to be flattered and regretted by women."

"Do they? I wonder if your experience of men and women is drawn chiefly from novels, or from life?"

"Which would you say, to look at me?" And she turned her fair young face full upon him, bringing it very near his.

"I wonder where your Aunt Daisy is all this while?"

"In the garden, Mr. Stewart. She passed the window just now. I was just thinking

of looking for her. Aunt Daisy declares that you are not her lover, only her friend, and that she never intends to marry, or I should have thought of the possibility of her being jealous of your kindness to me."

Mr. Stewart laughed, and Myrrha did not admire the tone of his laugh. She wished it had not been so dusk, she wanted to see the expression of his face.

"You had better not go out in those diaphanous draperies, now the dew is falling," he said. "I will find your Aunt Daisy, and say good night to her—as I say it now to you. Good night, Miss Brown. I am sure you will be too tired to ride to-morrow—we will hope for a fine day after to-morrow."

"There is no chance of my being too tired; but you will find me too troublesome if I want to ride every day."

He was gone. She watched the meeting in the garden, and the parting which followed upon it immediately; then, directly

Daisy came in, Myrrha, pleading extreme fatigue, said good night to her, and went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

IT seemed to Daisy that Myrrha grew lovelier every day. Daisy would sit and watch her, till the girl would look up from book or drawing to ask, "What is it, Aunt Daisy?"

"It is that you are so lovely, Myrrha, and that I wish—I wish I could be sure you are even half as good and true as you are lovely."

Flattered by this admiration, Myrrha answered affectionately:

"At any rate, auntie, I hope I'm not, as times go, and girls, very bad."

It did not seem to Daisy possible but that this loveliness should exercise at least as

strong a fascination over Mr. Stewart as it did over her. Mr. Stewart was quite ready to admit it would be difficult to find a fairer creature than the girl who rode beside him. The soft Spring wind, and the exercise in which she delighted, brought an ethereal bloom upon her young face, made her glee-some eyes shine crystal-clear, gave her fresh lips a more vivid red, and lent even her hair a brighter gloss, so that the netted-up mass looked like imprisoned sunshine.

Those rides together had come to be an all-but daily institution. It was long now since Myrrha had been spoken of between Mr. Stewart and Daisy. Mr. Stewart had left off talking of the probability that "business" might call him away.

It was towards the end of June that Myrrha went, prettily and appropriately, through the farce of "discovering" (what she had some time known) that Mr. Stewart and the owner of Redcombe were one and the same person. About this time Mr. Stew-

art announced to her that the owner of Redcombe, having heard of a strange and lovely princess in the neighbourhood, who had a passion for croquet and for garden-parties, had determined, on a certain day, to give a *fête* in honour of the fair unknown, and had had a croquet-lawn, pronounced by competent judges to be admirable, prepared for the occasion. Myrrha at this lifted to Mr. Stewart a face so radiant with surprise and delight, that Mr. Stewart felt something of pleased tenderness towards such frankly shown pleasure.

"The owner of Redcombe is a friend of yours, then, Mr. Stewart! And you've been telling him about me. How very, very kind you are to me! I don't know what I won't do for you! I've suspected something of this, do you know, Mr. Stewart? He must be a very dear friend, for I've learnt that our horses come from his stables, and——"

"You're quite wrong, Myrrha, as to his

being a very dear friend. On the contrary, he's my worst enemy."

Myrrha looked him in the face long and scrutinisingly.

"I know what you mean!" she then cried, delightedly. "A man is said to be his own worst enemy. You are the owner of Redcombe! Oh, Mr. Stewart, if I loved (I mean liked) you before, shan't I love you ten times over now!" All this said with sparkling eyes, and eager lips, that looked quite ready to kiss him, if only he would bend towards them. "And you are going to give this *fête* for me? You are kind——"

"I give it to amuse your Aunt Daisy's visitor!"

"That is meant for a snub; but I won't take it as such. I know everything will be delightful! I know I shall enjoy myself as I've never done in my life before."

And when the day came, it proved to be one of Myrrha's golden days, 'till towards

its close, when it clouded over. All through the day Mr. Stewart so distinguished her that it must have been evident to all eyes that she was the queen of the *fête*. She more than once heard herself pointed out as the young lady Mr. Stewart was soon to marry; for, of course, their constant riding together had set such rumours afloat. Then, again, everything was admirably managed; she found golden traces of wealth everywhere, and Redcombe manor-house far surpassed her expectations. She was delighted with everything, and showed her delight with the most complete *abandon*. What she had said to Mr. Stewart, "That if she had loved him before, as the owner of Redcombe she loved him ten times over," seemed true in the very simplicity of truthfulness. She tried to be composed and dignified; she wished Mr. Stewart to feel that it was no mere child he was distinguishing, but a woman quite capable of well playing the

part of mistress of Redcombe manor on some similar future occasion.

Against her will, however, the croquet-lawn attracted her: although Mr. Stewart did not play croquet, she lost herself in the game, as legitimate part of which she considered light flirtation with all the men engaged in it. She received delicious homage, and for the first time since she came into the neighbourhood, felt herself appreciated. Every other girl, cast into the shade, turned sullen, and every man seemed ready to fall upon his knees. For a brief while she forgot her wisdom, and turned aside from the serious ambitions of life. The beauty of the day, the gaiety of the scene, the consciousness of her own pre-eminent loveliness, the almost as delicious consciousness of the exquisite perfection of her dress, intoxicated the nineteen-years'-old creature. By-and-by, after an hour or so, and when this sort of wholesale flirtation was growing fast and furious, Myrrha suddenly came to

her more sober self, seeing Mr. Stewart, sitting by Daisy, watching her amusedly.

"This is all very pleasant, but it won't pay now—it can come after," was the substance of Myrrha's reflections. As soon as she could, and not too ceremoniously, using her spoilt-beauty air, she disengaged herself from the players, and joined her Aunt Daisy and Mr. Stewart.

"Will you, please, take me somewhere to have a cup of tea?" she asked Mr. Stewart. "I'm so tired and so thirsty."

"Won't you come too?" Mr. Stewart asked Daisy, as he rose and offered Myrrha his arm; but Daisy, who was talking to an old lady who had just joined her, did not hear the question.

"I'm sorry you're tired already, fair frivolity," Mr. Stewart said. "The day is not half over."

"I only mean tired of croquet. It's a stupid game; but, somehow, one gets excited over it."

"So it seems."

"Why did you call me 'fair frivolity?' You should not call me such an ugly name."

"'Ugly!' I defy anyone to call you anything ugly. We were saying just now —your Aunt Daisy and I—that we had never seen a more lovely or a more happy-looking creature."

"Well, Mr. Stewart, I am happy to-day. I do enjoy myself. It is all so beautiful, and the thought that you planned it all for me is certainly not the least cause of my happiness."

"For your Aunt Daisy's guest," corrected Mr. Stewart.

Myrrha made a grimace.

"You won't be so cruel as to try to spoil all my happiness," she said. "You will spoil it all if you call me frivolous."

"I will call you only fair, then."

"The fact is," continued Myrrha, "I am so happy to-day that I want to be still happier."

"Insatiable human nature! Let us hope that, as you are beginning to be tired, the cup of tea, of which we are in pursuit, will, by refreshing you, increase and prolong your happiness."

"I won't be shut up in that way, Mr. Stewart," said Myrrha, pouting, and giving the arm her hand was on a sharp pinch. "A cup of tea is a good thing and I shall be glad to have it, but I want more than that. I want to know, just really and truly, that you don't dislike, or altogether despise, me."

"My dear young lady, your thoughts and your words are wild! Dislike you!—despise you! Why should I—how could I—do either? I dislike you and despise you as much as I should dislike and despise some lovely flower, because it did not happen to be my favourite among all flowers."

Poor Myrrha paused. She was quick

enough to feel to the full all that was hidden in this answer.

"Have you a favourite flower, Mr. Stewart?" she asked, after that pause.

"The flower that was Chaucer's worship is mine."

Myrrha's "Ah!" was so significant and intelligent, that he felt sure she was in the dark as to what he meant.

"You remember, no doubt," he went on, "Chaucer's account of how he used to rise early, and go far, to see the first sunbeams fall on his favourite, and of how he would spend a day content lying on the grass, encircling his flower with his arms?"

A thrill in Mr. Stewart's voice perplexed Myrrha; she looked up into his face, and saw a strange light there. With a vague recollection of having heard of Chaucer's Romaunt of the Rose, Myrrha said, after a few seconds of reflection,

"Now I shall know of whom to feel jealous. I shall look out for your rose."

"The rose is such a universal favourite, Myrrha. Would you have thought me the man to worship at the shrine at which all offer homage?"

"I don't know that I understand you to-day. Tell me what flower you would give me as my emblem."

"Let me see." He looked at her investigatingly. "If you will come to the conservatory, I will show you a new geranium, the 'bride,' to which, it seems to me, you, in that delicate dress, bear a wonderful resemblance."

"Well," said Myrrha, after looking at the flower, "it's pretty enough, but it has no sweetness; and—do you care for geraniums, Mr. Stewart?" looking up into his face wistfully.

"'Care for' is one of those indefinite feminine expressions a man doesn't exactly appreciate. I admire the 'bride.' Who could help admiring such an exquisite creature?"

Then they passed from the conservatory into a room where a stately elderly lady (his housekeeper) was dispensing tea.

"This is a charming room!" exclaimed Myrrha. "Just a little lightening up, and it would make the most delightful ladies' morning-room."

"When the 'bride' comes to Redcombe, if, indeed, she ever comes, she will make many alterations, doubtless. I leave the whole place alone till she issues her commands."

Myrrha looked at Mr. Stewart, then looked down; she wished to blush, but her delicate complexion was not of the blushing sort.

Other people came and went, and Myrrha kept Mr. Stewart at her side, engaging him in a half-sentimental war of words, speaking low, so that he might need to bend down to hear her, conscious that elderly ladies watched them curiously, and young ladies watched them enviously; leaning back in

that "delicious chair," Myrrha was lazily happy. The eyes raised to Mr. Stewart's had a soft languor in them which rather startled him. He did not believe in much real softness in Myrrha; he had judged her nature to be rather cold and hard, and, as it were, thin; yet, perhaps, he was mildly flattered at the marked preference of a creature so young and so lovely. "Marked preference for Redcombe over any other home of which she has believed she had the chance," Mr. Stewart inwardly commented; but perhaps the cynicism of the comment was somewhat forced.

Myrrha kept her position, and so kept Mr. Stewart beside her till she fancied she saw signs of restlessness and of wandering attention; then she said,

"Mr. Stewart, don't you think poor dear Aunt Daisy will feel neglected if we don't go and look for her?"

This "poor dear Aunt Daisy" annoyed Mr. Stewart.

"I have for some time been wishing to rejoin her," he answered.

"I do think you are the most terribly ungallant man I ever met. To punish you for that atrocious speech, you must, before we leave this house, show me the library. Ah, Mr. Stewart, this is a grand room!" she said, looking round it with eyes that, for a moment, seemed reverent. "If I might come and read here," she said, coaxingly; "if you would tell me what books to read, and what I ought to think about them! If you would teach me a little! If you would spare me just one hour every day for a reading-lesson! Why do you shake your head?"

"Too dangerous a position for me to play schoolmaster to so pretty a pupil."

"I wish I were not pretty, then, Mr. Stewart."

"Excuse me for saying I doubt the sincerity of that wish."

"I don't much care about being only

pretty; I should like to be beautiful."

"Beautiful in the way your Aunt Daisy is, for instance? But it needs a great deal to gain that sort of beauty."

"I suppose you are jesting, Mr. Stewart; but it is not pretty of you to laugh at poor Aunt Daisy."

"Miss Brown, you know better than to suppose I am jesting. I say your Aunt Daisy is beautiful."

"Then, if that is beauty," said Myrrha, losing her temper all at once—"to look old and worn, to have irregular features, and no complexion to speak of—I retract my wish to be beautiful. But either you are jesting, or you are most extraordinarily infatuated."

"It is certainly not a subject on which I should choose to jest. I am quite willing to grant that you are far prettier than your aunt. Your features are not irregular, you have a complexion to speak of, you are in the first fresh bloom of youth; but I

maintain that your Aunt Daisy has a higher kind of beauty."

Myrrha paused before speaking, then she said,

"I know I have made you angry, because you call me Miss Brown. I am more sorry than I can say. You had been so kind to me; and now my happy day is spoilt. But I can't help saying it is very extraordinary, Mr. Stewart, that you should be so deluded about Aunt Daisy. Your admiration of her character perplexes me. I have the feeling that some day you will know her better, and see her differently, and then——"

"Miss Brown, pause in time. You are wise; don't let your feelings carry you so far that you say what I could never forgive."

Myrrha took his advice; she did pause: they were just then walking down a shady and solitary beech glade. She took her hand from his arm, and, leaning a moment

against a beech trunk, indulged in a short, a very short, storm of tears. Mr. Stewart merely waited. In a few minutes she passed her embroidered handkerchief lightly over her face, then looked up into Mr. Stewart's.

"Does it show? Are my eyes red? Do I look as if I had been crying?"

"Not in the least."

"Now, Mr. Stewart, I am not going to move from here till you forgive me, and call me Myrrha again. I don't think I am much more to blame than you are. You don't know how you hurt me. You are always showing me how frivolous and empty you think me: how you despise me. You never seem to believe in me if I show any desire to be different. If I own how I long to have some one strong and true, and on whom I could rely to help me, you ridicule me. You have been very, very cruel to me, just, I suppose, because I have shown frankly how I like you, how I desire your kindness. This was such a

happy day, because you seemed to like me to-day: and now it's all turned to bitterness, and I'm very unhappy." Her eyes were full of tears, and her voice was ominously excited. "No, I won't, won't, won't move till you call me Myrrha, and say something kind to me."

"We will talk of all this some other time, Myrrha. Come, take my arm again. Forgive you? Yes, I forgive you—and you must forgive me if you have anything to forgive, and if what you say is true, you have a great deal."

Myrrha, after a suppressed sob or two, took his arm, and let him lead her to where, more than an hour ago, they had left Daisy, and where Daisy still sat.

A day or two after this Myrrha met Mr. Stewart with the words:

"I've found it out, Mr. Stewart; it is not the rose that is your favourite flower, though you let me think so. I have found out what is your favourite. I came, quite

accidentally, in a book I was reading, upon a quotation from Chaucer, in which he speaks of the 'Day's Eye,' and of his love for it——"

Mr. Stewart rightly concluded, from this explanation of Myrrha's, that she had been studying Chaucer purposely to discover the passage.

"Well," he said, "I hope you approve my taste and Chaucer's?"

"Oh, of course." Then, after a pause, "Will you forgive me, I wonder, if I ask a very rude question?"

"I will try to do so; but might it not be better, if the question be a rude one, to leave it unasked?"

"I cannot. I am too interested in having it answered; but—I'm afraid you'll be so dreadfully angry!"

"You make the choice, you see, between risking my dreadful anger and losing the chance of gratifying your curiosity."

"It is much more than mere curiosity."

"And it will be, I dare say, much less than 'dreadful' anger."

"It is only this: I want to know, Mr. Stewart, why you don't marry Aunt Daisy?"

"Is it 'only that' you wish to know, Miss Brown?" Mr. Stewart's face reddened angrily. Myrrha, seeing this, and hearing the tone in which he called her Miss Brown, hid her face in her hands, and looked out at him from between her fingers, pretending to shrink away. "The question is very easily answered. I don't marry your Aunt Daisy because she won't let me; because she won't marry me. There is no other reason; there can be no other; but this, you will allow, is a sufficient one."

"Aunt Daisy says she will never marry, and she says it in a way that shows she means it."

"Of course she means it; your Aunt Daisy always says what she means."

"No, Mr. Stewart; Aunt Daisy, I dare

say, always means what she says, but she means, also, a great deal she never says. She is very secret; I feel quite certain that Aunt Daisy conceals something very important. It has crossed my mind to wonder whether she may not be already married!"

Mr. Stewart laughed derisively. "So, you've been making your Aunt Daisy the heroine of a sensational novel, have you?"

"Mr. Stewart, you promised your anger should be less than dreadful, but it isn't—you're dreadfully angry; and it isn't fair you should be. If you knew my reasons for touching this subject, if you understood my heart on this subject, you would, at least, pity me."

Something rose to Mr. Stewart's lips which he preferred not to say; he turned from Myrrha abruptly and went into the house; she had waylaid him in the garden. But she contrived to speak a few more confidential words to him before he left.

"If you had been a little more tolerant

with me, I, perhaps, could have told you things that might have been useful to you. Yes, you needn't look so superbly scornful; though I am but 'a child of nineteen,' as you've told me often enough, and you are a man of forty—still I am a woman, and you're only a man, and women know by instinct things that men's reason and wisdom never seem to teach them. Of course, if there is really between you and Aunt Daisy some insuperable obstacle, nothing will be of any good; but if there is nothing but some foolish fancy of hers, there is a thing that would help you—to make her a little jealous. Oh, yes, I know you think this a treasonable suggestion; but, Mr. Stewart, Aunt Daisy is only a woman, not even a very wise one. Having said this, I will run away." Which she did.

In truth, Myrrha was getting tired of Redcombe Cottage.

"If he's going to marry Aunt Daisy I wish he'd do it. If he isn't going to marry

Aunt Daisy, why then I wish to make him sure and certain that he isn't. I don't want to be worried. I like Mr. Stewart, and don't I like Redcombe Manor House! I believe I could get fond of Mr. Stewart, and I know I could get fond of Redcombe Manor! If I could get them I should be glad; but I don't want to be kept shilly-shallying; to be made to feel worried, and to waste my time. I shall soon be twenty—after twenty a girl like me often begins to go off and to look sickly, and to get too thin. I'm sure I don't want to take him from Aunt Daisy, if she means to have him; but if she doesn't, I don't see why she should play dog-in-the-manger."

CHAPTER VI.

AND how was it with Daisy now? Just thus: life seemed one uncomprehended ache. The long, lovely Summer days, the long, lonely Summer evenings, were full of an intolerable something, the reason of which, the nature of which, she was always vainly trying to discover. Sometimes Daisy, busy with her needle, in the house or in the garden, while Myrrha rode with Mr. Stewart, would think for hours uninterruptedly, and in these hours she thought much of her child. There was something in the world (had it been dead, she knew she would have been told) which was hers, and no other's; and, instead of clasping it close, she had shut her arms and

her heart against it. Therefore, of her loneliness she had no right to complain.

"She will stay with me till she is married, I suppose," Daisy said to herself one evening, looking at Myrrha; "I suppose she must be married from here. Well—I hope it will be soon. I shall be glad to have it over. Will Kenneth be happy?—will Kenneth be happy? That should be my only question—my only care. Will Kenneth be happy?" She sighed. "Perhaps," she went on, "when a man is as old as Kenneth before he marries, when he marries he likes to have his wife young enough to be to him something of a child; he isn't used to sympathy and companionship, and doesn't need them. If only I could believe in Myrrha—if her childishness were more of the sweet, simple sort; but she is so strange a mixture; in some ways so old-hearted—so worldly-wise. If I could even be sure that she loves him—that she can love anything but herself!"

Myrrha sat on a low chair, her face on her hand, her elbow on her knee, gazing into the fire that had been lighted to please her. She said the evening was cold, and that, to be cold, made her cross; she said, too, that her ride, which had been unusually short that afternoon, had been "nasty" and "disagreeable." Her attitude was disconsolate, the expression of her face was sullen. After several timid glances at the girl, Daisy, in crossing the room, paused behind her, and laid a soft hand on her shoulder.

"Myrrha," she began—her voice trembled with earnestness, and her eyes moistened as she spoke,—"you are not playing with him as you tell me you have done with others, are you? Remember he is not a young man, with all the chances of life before him. He has suffered much. He has had in life much sorrow and little joy. And, Myrrha, he is so good, so noble, so patient, so unselfish, so good. Forgive me for speaking to you so, but, Myrrha, he is

so dear a friend of mine—his happiness is so much to me. Tell me you love him, and that you mean to be to him a good and faithful wife."

"Who in the world are you speaking about, Aunt Daisy?" Myrrha asked, roughly.

"Of whom should I be speaking but of Mr. Stewart?"

"Mr. Stewart! I make Mr. Stewart a good and faithful wife! You've been asleep and dreaming, Aunt Daisy."

"Do you mean, Myrrha, that you are not engaged to Mr. Stewart?"

"Certainly I do mean, Aunt Daisy, that I am not engaged to Mr. Stewart. Why, he's old enough to be my father! That *you* should be engaged to him, that *you* should make him a good and faithful wife, would be much more suitable."

"Myrrha!"

"Aunt Daisy, you're a fool—or—ah! yes, I know I'm rude and rough, but I don't

mean it unkindly. You love Mr. Stewart, and he's fond of you. You are always hankering after him; the idea of his marrying me has been making you look like a martyr. Why on earth don't you marry him and have done with it? I begin to think you must be married already, or something! How else is one to understand your conduct? You know he's fond of you, you know you love him as you love your life, but you 'don't mean to marry.' Now, Aunt Daisy, I've some common sense, and I know there must be more in this than meets the eye: something more than old-maidish nonsense and scruples."

Daisy had turned from pale to red, and then from red to pale, but she had been too much taken by surprise to check this outbreak, and Myrrha went on—

"I'll tell you what I think of Mr. Stewart, and then you'll understand that I at least am not dying of love for him. I think him a detestable prig, an insufferable pedant,

and a ridiculous coxcomb. You may tell him so, with my compliments, if you like, Aunt Daisy." So saying, Myrrha left the room.

In five or ten minutes she returned to it, knelt down before Daisy, and held her soft cheek to Daisy's lips.

"Please forgive me, Aunt Daisy. I was abominably rude. Something had put me out."

Daisy kissed her, but did not speak. Myrrha got up, lingered irresolutely a moment, then went away.

Daisy did not attach much importance to Myrrha's plain denial of any engagement between herself and Mr. Stewart; she knew that Myrrha was clever at all kinds of prevarication, and not even appalled by positive untruth. She concluded there had been between Myrrha and Mr. Stewart some more or less serious quarrel; she had noticed that Mr. Stewart had looked gravely displeased, and had bid Miss Brown good night very coldly.

The next day Mr. Stewart did not come to the cottage, nor the next. Myrrha had no rides; she drooped visibly. The third day Daisy noticed that Myrrha seemed always listening, and on the watch. She was much in the garden, always where she could see the gate.

In the afternoon of this third day Mr. Stewart walked over. Myrrha met him at the gate, and Daisy saw the meeting from the open drawing-room window. Mr. Stewart was about to pass Myrrha with a bow. She stepped in front of him.

"My visit is to your Aunt Daisy, Miss Brown."

Myrrha laid her hand on his arm pleadingly. Daisy could not hear what was spoken now, the tone of both was low. But Myrrha's upturned, earnest face, and Mr. Stewart's attentive, listening attitude, told her enough. Evidently Myrrha succeeded in obtaining forgiveness for whatever offence she had committed. She kept her hand

upon his arm, and Myrrha laughing, Mr. Stewart trying still to look grave, they came into the house, into the drawing-room where Daisy sat.

"Aunt Daisy," Myrrha said, coming and kneeling down before her, "I am Mr. Stewart's captive, and he insists upon bringing me to your feet. Our quarrel the other day—the quarrel that made me so cross—was about you, Aunt Daisy. Mr. Stewart will only forgive me on condition that I express my sorrow for having spoken rudely and falsely. I express my sorrow for having spoken rudely and falsely. Please forgive me, and then I shall be taken for some rides again."

Daisy leaned down and kissed her. Myrrha sprang up.

"There, now I shall get a ride to-morrow—shan't I, Mr. Stewart?"

"Certainly, if you wish, and if the weather allow."

"All the same," muttered Myrrha, nod-

ding to herself as she moved away, "I said nothing but what was true."

And so, for a little while, things went on just as before again.

One day Mr. Stewart asked Daisy to show Myrrha some of her sketches, adding:

"I'm surprised to find she didn't even know you could draw."

"I never do draw now."

"But you will let her see how you used to draw. If my memory is at all accurate, she will be able to learn a good deal—should she choose to do so—by looking over your portfolio. May I fetch it? Is it where I can find it?"

"No; I must look for it myself."

Daisy went to her room, and dragged a large old portfolio out of a closet; hastily turning over its contents, she withdrew several sketches, which she put away out of sight. They were studies of foreign scenes, and would have led to much questioning.

She sent the folio downstairs, and was a few minutes before she followed it. It was painful to her to have looked it over; it was ruffling too many pages of memory.

Daisy, when she returned to the drawing-room, sat apart, took up a book, and tried not to turn the attention of either her eyes or her ears towards the table where Myrrha and Mr. Stewart sat. She was not long left in peace.

"Where is this, Daisy?" Mr. Stewart asked,—"an old farm-house I don't remember to have seen—a curious study of greens and greys."

Daisy looked up. Mr. Stewart held in his hand a careful drawing of Moor-Edge farm-house, made long ago, before it had come to be the home of her dear old nurse. Daisy paused, her colour changed; she answered, trying to speak carelessly:

"That is the farm-house nurse expected to go to when she married. She asked me to make her a picture of it. I did that for

her before she was married. I thought she had it."

"Didn't she go to it, then? Isn't this where you stayed with her?"

"Oh no."

Mr. Stewart then was evidently about to ask something more; but Daisy, though she tried not to do so, looked up at him. There must have been terror and appeal in her eyes, for his were inquiring and compassionate. Daisy's look, falling from Mr. Stewart's face, fixed itself on the picture; a trance-like feeling came over her, as if she had suddenly begun to dream. It was as if, out of those walls and windows, no longer pictured, but real, her child cried to her, and in her heart there was a responsive cry. By-and-by, when she thought she could do so unobserved, she rose up and left the room. Unobserved! One pair of love-watchful eyes—one pair that shone with somewhat malicious curiosity—noticed the feebleness with which she moved.

"Aunt Daisy is not well. Hadn't I better go to her?"

"I think she would rather be alone."

"Aunt Daisy has just told you a falsehood, and telling falsehoods doesn't agree with poor dear Aunt Daisy. You have often spoken of Aunt Daisy as a model of candour and simple truth. I admit she isn't clever at speaking what isn't true, and doesn't seem to be used to it."

"Your Aunt Daisy is a model of candour and simple truth. Speaking of her as such, I spoke truly of her."

"Yet she has just told you a lie. You know that as well as I do."

"I think, Miss Brown, it would be more becoming in you to refrain from such free speaking."

Myrrha appeared not to hear this remark. She said, with a show of feeling,

"Sometimes, Mr. Stewart, I feel afraid that poor Aunt Daisy is very unhappy—that she has some secret which preys upon

her. If she has, wouldn't she tell it to you, who are such an old friend? If you told her you were sure she had a secret, and begged her to tell it to you, don't you think she would?"

Myrrha gave a quick, investigating glance into Mr. Stewart's face. She was wondering if he already knew or guessed Aunt Daisy's secret. A secret there was, she was by this time quite sure.

"You young girls are so full of romantic fancies in this novel-reading age. Your Aunt Daisy is not the sort of woman to have anything concerning herself to conceal. If she has a secret it is not her own. Possibly, that farmer her old nurse married has got into difficulties, and she has promised not to tell anyone where he is now living."

"You suspect something quite different from that," said Myrrha, nodding knowingly. "That is a quite absurdly inadequate cause for things I have noticed. I have my own suspicions, but——"

"I will not have your Aunt Daisy and 'suspicions' named together," he answered, angrily. Then he went on more calmly: "You entirely fail to understand your Aunt Daisy's character. Though she may have more delicacy and reserve of feeling than is usual in these days, she is not a woman to have secrets and concealments. Where she loves she would trust."

"But perhaps, Mr. Stewart, poor Aunt Daisy, who seems so lonely, has never loved any one enough to trust them entirely."

Those words of Myrrha's fell coldly on Mr. Stewart's heart. Myrrha went on—

"You see, Mr. Stewart, Aunt Daisy is so peculiarly lonely. I am the only connexion, not to say relation, she has whom she knows. And I don't think she loves me very much; and I know she doesn't trust me at all. Whom else has she?"

"So you evidently don't think, Miss Brown, that your Aunt Daisy loves and trusts me?"

"I can only answer by stating facts. Aunt Daisy has, I am sure, a secret. You don't know it, she doesn't mean you to know it. I suppose, therefore, she doesn't trust you. As to loving you, it wouldn't, of course, be proper she should love you, unless as her husband; and, it seems, she won't have you as that. You are a man, you are no relation, you are not a proper person for Aunt Daisy to love and trust, unless she meant to marry you. Aunt Daisy doesn't mean to marry you. Aunt Daisy isn't the sort of woman to do what isn't proper, therefore, I suppose, she doesn't love and trust you."

"How logical!"

"You needn't sneer at me."

"How is it you state so positively that your Aunt Daisy doesn't mean to marry me?"

"Hasn't she told you so herself?" was Myrrha's counter-question.

"I was asking the reason of your belief."

"She has told me that she doesn't mean

to marry; and I'm quite, quite sure that there's some serious secret at the bottom of her not meaning to marry."

"You can't, I suppose, understand that there may be women who don't wish to marry, merely because they don't wish to marry."

"You mean that for impertinence—but——"

Here the entrance of a servant, asking for Daisy, interrupted them; soon after, Daisy herself came into the room. Within a few minutes of that, Mr. Stewart rose to take his leave.

"Myrrha," he said, bluntly, "I want a few words alone with your Aunt Daisy."

He spoke holding the door open.

"You mean I am to go away?"

"If I may so far trouble you."

She swept out, giving him, as she passed him, a somewhat mocking smile and a significant nod.

Daisy looked frightened, and began to

tremble. "Is anything the matter? If it is only—about Myrrha—you needn't trouble to tell me. I know."

"It is not about Myrrha—it is about myself and yourself. It is only a word. I want no answer. You needn't speak. I only want you to know that I am changed in nothing—that I am ready, that I am longing, to take all your cares and troubles, of whatever kind they may be (remember, I say it, and mean it, of whatever kind they may be), to be my cares and troubles. Twice lately you have said to me what was not true, Daisy; more than I can tell you it has hurt me that you should do that; but I trust you, nevertheless. You needn't speak. I merely wish you to know that I am waiting for you still, that I shall always wait for you till I get you. That as much as ever I wanted you, which is as much as a man ever wanted a woman, I still want you for my wife."

Daisy was now trembling very visibly.

He went away before she had said any other word.

"'With all your cares and troubles of whatever nature,'" she repeated. "What a stress he laid upon that! To think how he loves me! And how I love him! And I may not tell him I love him, love him, love him! May not throw my arms round his dear neck, and say, 'Take me, do with me anything you will.'"

Daisy dreamt, wide-eyed, of the deliciousness of such surrender. Then Myrrha came in.

"Well, Aunt Daisy, may I congratulate you? Do you still say you don't mean to marry?"

"Yes, Myrrha, there is no change." But she felt as if there were change—as if the whole world had changed. She wished the girl good-night, and locked herself into her own room.

Daisy had no sleep that night. All the fight was fought over again. All the per-

plexity of her trouble was reawakened; but the core of her consciousness was sweet, was love. When she drew aside her curtains, and looked out into a fair, still Autumn dawn, she said,

"He shall have the truth. It will tear my life out to tell him; but he has a right to my life. He shall have the truth. Things shan't go on in this way any longer. I am wasting his life. He shall have the truth." It had come, she felt, to the ultimate extremity—she must now say to Kenneth: "All this time I have been deceiving you. I have been a wife. I am a mother. You think me innocent, loving, truthful. I hated my husband. I deserted my child. I have lied with my whole life. I have deceived you."

At first she thought she would write her confession; but she felt as if she must know how he would look when he heard it, how he would feel it, how he would bear it.

Mr. Stewart, when he came to the cottage next morning, found Myrrha still in her morning dress, standing at the gate.

"You have forgotten we settled it would not any longer be too warm for morning rides?"

Myrrha made no answer, except "Oh, Mr. Stewart!"

He saw that she had been crying, and looked painfully excited; he was off his horse and at her side in a moment.

"Is anything the matter? Your Aunt Daisy is not ill?"

"Send the man away," commanded Myrrha.

"Not till I know I shall not want him."

"Come out of his hearing, then."

With a muttered "Confound the girl!" Mr. Stewart followed Myrrha from the gate. Myrrha presently stopped, turned, and faced him with the words:

"Mr. Stewart, Aunt Daisy is gone."

"Gone!" He stood quite still a moment.

Then he went to the gate to order his groom to take the horses back; to have his hunter saddled, and waiting at the corner of the lane in as short a time as possible.

"Now, Myrrha, just the simple truth of all you know, as quickly as possible," he said, returning to her. "What do you mean when you say that your Aunt Daisy is gone?"

"Mean? I mean just what I say. Aunt Daisy is gone!"

"When? How? Where?"

"I don't know anything about where—I know very little about anything; and what I do know I won't tell you if you speak so crossly, and look so angry. As if it were my fault. As if I were not as great a sufferer as anybody. As if I hadn't had enough to shake my nerves already!" And Myrrha began to sob.

"There, there," said Mr. Stewart, soothingly. "I beg your pardon if I was ungentle. Now, be a good, sensible girl,

Myrrha, forget yourself for once, and just tell me what there is to tell. Not much, I expect. It will prove to be a much-ado-about-nothing sort of story. Come, just tell me all you know." He took her hand, drew it through his arm, and led her to a garden-seat. Myrrha dried her eyes and sat down.

"It was a letter did it, Mr. Stewart—a letter that came this morning—of this I feel quite sure. But she told me nothing—she never trusted me. I know nothing. But I'm sure it's something very bad. I believe we shall never see her again. I fancy, I've an impression, that she's gone away to drown herself."

Here Myrrha, who was vaguely alarmed, and had a very genuine consciousness of the discomfort of her own position, began to sob again.

"I want neither your beliefs, nor fancies, nor impressions, nor any such nonsense as you have just spoken. Just tell me, from

the beginning, what took place. First, when you say it was a letter did it, what do you mean by 'did it'?"

"I mean frightened her so that she ran away."

"Ran away—pshaw! Possibly she heard of the illness of some friend, and is gone for the day, to be back at night."

"Mr. Stewart, it was much more than that!" Myrrha said, with angry solemnity. "She is not coming back. She told me as good as that she was not coming back."

"Her words—tell me in what words she said she was not coming back." Quite unintentionally he slightly shook Myrrha's arm as he spoke. Myrrha withdrew it indignantly.

"How rough, how unkind you are!" she exclaimed. "You might have some feeling for me, Mr. Stewart; I'm sure I'm to be pitied. What can I do? What will become of me? I can't, young as I am, stay here alone; and where am I to go?"

"We will settle all that afterwards: the first thing is for me to know all I can about your Aunt Daisy. What were her words when she 'as good as told you' she was not coming back?"

"She said that if she didn't come back, I was to ask you for advice; that you would be a true friend to me."

"Was that this morning, or last night?"

"This morning."

"And about the letter. It came by post?"

"I suppose so; the post was in when I came down. I was late this morning, for I didn't sleep well last night, and I woke with a headache—one of my very bad headaches. I've been subject to them ever since——"

"Never mind about your headaches just now. Your aunt had read this letter, to which you attach so much importance, when you came down?"

"No, and I don't think she had seen it. It lay under one for me."

"You saw nothing different from usual in your Aunt Daisy till she read that letter?"

"No. She flushed up when I gave it to her. I didn't suppose it could be interesting, and I was surprised to see her flush."

"Why didn't you suppose it could be interesting?"

"It didn't look like a gentleman's letter, or a lady's. I didn't pay any particular attention to her as she read the letter, because my own letter was very interesting" (with a conscious air), "and it was long. I didn't notice Aunt Daisy till I'd finished it, and then——"

"Well?"

"Then I looked up, and was going to tell her something" (this spoken with that same conscious air), "but I saw her looking so that she frightened me."

"How did she look?"

"She looked awful—just like a person coming out of a bad swoon."

"What did she say?"

"Of course I asked her what was the matter. At first she didn't seem alive enough to speak. The first thing she did say was just to ask me to ring the bell for Mrs. Moss."

"Well, when Mrs. Moss came, what did your Aunt Daisy say to her?"

"She just told her she'd had bad news, and must go away."

"Go away for a day or so, she said, of course?"

"She said nothing of the sort. She only told Mrs. Moss to pack a few things for her as quickly as possible, and to send at once to the village to order the fly."

"To take her where?"

"To the station."

"Well, go on."

"That is all."

"You have nothing more to tell me?"

"Nothing."

"Child, why, in the name of all that was irrational, didn't you send to me at once?"

"She told me not to do so."

"She left no message for me?"

"Yes, she did."

"Myrrha, you would try any man's patience. What was it? And why didn't you deliver it at once?"

"Have you given me time? Haven't I had enough to do in answering your questions? The message was only this: I was to tell Kenneth that she would soon write—that, meanwhile, he was not to bè anxious for her; that no harm had happened to her, or, as far as she knew, was likely to happen to her."

"'No harm had happened to her, or, as far as she knew, was likely to happen to her!'" Mr. Stewart repeated this to himself as he went off to find Mrs. Moss. From her he gathered no further information, but it somewhat reassured him to find that she evidently expected her mistress's return within a very short time.

"You should have gone with her, Mrs. Moss."

"Sir, she forbade it utterly."

Mr. Stewart went into the breakfast-room. He looked about there keenly and searchingly, possibly hoping to find the envelope of the letter, and so to get some clue. Presently Myrrha stood beside him.

"Mr. Stewart," she said, in a just audible whisper, "what can it mean? Won't you tell me what you think is the matter? The more I think about it, the more frightened I get. Aunt Daisy had a strange look in her eyes sometimes, quite like a person who had been, or might be, mad. I feel sure she had some dreadful trouble to hide. I can't help thinking that she has gone away to destroy herself."

Mr. Stewart turned upon Myrrha savagely; but the girl looked so white, so scared, such a fragile, unstable creature, that instead of the harsh words that rose to his lips, what he spoke was mere reassuring banter. Then he stood, perhaps ten minutes, contemplating his own hand apparently, seeing nothing, and thinking profoundly.

"What are you going to do?" asked Myrrha, when he moved.

"Going to do! I'm going to find her—to take care of her. She is not fit to be alone and in trouble. It is what you say of how ill she looked, that makes me anxious; otherwise, of course, one would merely wait till she came home."

"Mr. Stewart, what shall I do? She told me to ask you."

"What shall you do? Why, just stay here quietly till your Aunt Daisy comes back."

"She will never come back."

"Or, if you prefer to do so—if you think you shall be lonely here—just return to your friends. That might be best—to return to your friends."

"I have no friends to whom I can return."

"Stay here, then, for the present. For the present, Myrrha, I have no thought to spare for your affairs."

"Of course not. I never expected you would have. I knew you would be far too much alarmed about poor Aunt Daisy."

"I'm not alarmed, but I'm anxious."

"She told me to do all I could to comfort you; but, of course, I know I can do nothing. And she said you would be kind to me."

"So I will be, by-and-by, when I've time to think about you. Good-bye, now." And so he left her.

"He cares more for Aunt Daisy's little finger than for me, and all the world besides. And I do like him, and I love Redcombe; and I can't go home, and I won't go out as a governess, and what am I to do? What will become of me?"

And Myrrha burst into passionate crying, It didn't matter if she made her eyes red and her face swollen; there was no one to see her, and there would be nobody; at which terribly pathetic thought her sobs and tears burst forth afresh.

Mr. Stewart, as he went away, thought to himself: "Of any woman but Daisy, acting as she acts, speaking as she speaks, one would have the most serious suspicions. But Daisy is, has been, and will be, Daisy."

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE Daisy travelled all day. By road, by rail, by road. Lastly, she found herself, or thought herself, obliged to walk, a long walk of weary up-hill miles. By the time she had accomplished half this walk, her limbs were hardly able to support her, her brain hardly able to be her guide. Her strength so failed and flagged that she feared to fall by the way.

By-and-by she turned out of the rough deep lane into an open field, to sit and rest under a hedge, where she was hidden from any chance passer-by, where yet the wind might blow upon her. It was a hot, eerie sort of wind that was blowing that night. There had been a long drought, every-

thing had a crisp dryness; the silence of the time and of the solitary place was full of strange little sounds, each one of which startled poor timid Daisy, and set her heart beating in her ears. The dry leaves rustled on the trees, the bushes rustled as any bird or other small creature moved in them, the tall dry grasses rustled, and the ripe wheat on the other side the hedge. And all the innocent little sounds seemed to Daisy fateful and terrible, and she felt so ill, so deadly faint and ill.

No food had passed Daisy's lips that day. Mrs. Moss's care had provided her with some, but she had forgotten and left behind the little bag into which it had been put; as she had also forgotten and left behind her small portmanteau, losing sight of it at a station where she had changed lines. This evening there was no darkness, and there would be no darkness this night, for the moon was near the full, and the wind-swept sky was cloudless. Daisy felt as if she

would have been glad of darkness; the moonlight made her head giddy. As she sat there, trying to rest, and to steady herself, everything swam before her. Yet she dared not close her eyes, and so try to rest her brain, for the fear they might not again re-open.

To faint there! To die there! The thought was dreadful. She imagined herself being found, when the morning sun fell upon her, by some labourer going to his work: imagined rough tongues and rough hands busy with her, and thought of the horror of it all to Kenneth Stewart when he should come to know, as there was no hope but he would come to know. This thought nerved her to attempt to get on again. How much she would have given for one glass of wine, and one small crust of bread, for a draught of milk, even! but though she knew there was a farm-house in easy reach, where all these things were attainable, she shrank from being seen wandering alone so late.

Just as she had risen to go back into the lane, Daisy became aware of an advancing footstep; she cowered down till it should have gone by. If it should stop at the gate, if it should enter the field, she believed she should die of fright. But the step went harmless on; was, probably, she thought, that of some late labourer returning from his distant work. She waited till she could hear it no longer, till it must have gone far ahead, then went back to the lane, and struggled up it: after an hour of pain and difficulty coming in sight of the roof of Moor-Edge Farm.

There was from this point a shorter way of reaching the house than by keeping between the high hedges; a footway across the great steep field beneath it, now tented with corn-stooks. Daisy took this way. A little while and she could see all the windows of this side of the house: they were all closely shrouded. Walking on with her eyes fixed on the house, her feeble feet

presently stumbled over something; a something that cried out with a plaintive little cry.

Daisy looked down; that something looked up. The moonlight shone full on the wistful face of a child who, curled up near one of the corn-stooks, had fallen asleep,—forgotten. Forgotten by whom? Why did it never occur to Daisy to think that it had been forgotten by one of the women working in the field? Why did Daisy at once (as if in the world there were but one child) take it for granted, with her heart, that this child was her own? To find it there, forgotten, told her fully what was the great trouble fallen on the house, and of the helplessness of the one who had been its helper. It was the foster-mother, then, and not the child, whom death had taken. The hurried intimation of sorrow and death she had received had left it doubtful to her what had befallen.

As Daisy looked down upon the child,

the child looked up at Daisy. Before Daisy knew what she was about—before she understood anything with her understanding, though with her heart she knew it all, the little forlorn child was in her arms; she, on the ground, on her knees, was pressing it to her bosom, covering it with kisses, bathing it with tears—tears of a most thankful joy. One would have said this woman's heart had long been hungry for this child.

It was all ended. The struggle was over. That child was now lord and master of its mother's life; she was conscious, in some vague sort, that what her arms held now was her world.

Daisy was there, on the ground, a long time; coming only by degrees out of the sort of trance into which she had at first fallen, to a sense of there being something beyond and outside this moonlit and tented field in which she lay with her child. The little one, feeling itself cradled

softly, warmly, lovingly, had fallen asleep again.

Consciousness of the price to be paid for her child, dawned upon her. That life, as Kenneth Stewart's wife,—which had seemed to her so happy, she had been tempted to think that conscience could not trouble it, regret touch it, or sorrow reach it,—would be, for ever, impossible. But all that might have been seemed far off and long ago, while the child which was in her arms was her present. Had it, at this moment, been possible that she should have had the choice between Kenneth Stewart and the child, there would have been no hesitation, but, for all answer, a closer, more passionately clinging clasp of the child. There might afterwards have come times in which she would have thought it hard that, for this child's sake—a child who was not the child of love—she should have, all her life, to live loverless, husbandless, and friendless—a widow loathing to remember that she had

been a wife, a mother dreading to see the father of the child live again in her boy; but there was no room in her heart for such thoughts now.

"My son, my little son, my own darling little son!" was said with a very ecstasy of joyful possession. Poor foolish Daisy! With one faithful friend lying dead close at hand, her only other friend divided from her for ever (as she believed) by what she held in her arms. What she held in her arms, nevertheless, for that time, made her happy. She could have believed, for that time, that all the intolerable ache of longing and of loneliness that had filled the few last months of her life (while she had been believing in love between Mr. Stewart and Myrrha) had been caused by the want of her child. By-and-by it seemed to Daisy that a shadow passed between her and the moonlight—looking up she saw no one. But she was roused to the remembrance that it was late in the night, and that her child

ought to be in his little bed. She who, just now, had hardly been able to move her unburdened limbs, got up and walked bravely to the house, carrying the child. The door stood open, Daisy went in. An old woman sat crying over the kitchen fire; she showed no surprise on seeing Daisy.

"She said you'd be here by night. And so you've found the child!" she sobbed. "Poor, pretty, precious, forgotten lamb!"

She held her arms out to take the little one from Daisy. Daisy still retained him jealously.

"Which room is ready for me? The one I used to have? I'll put him to bed there," she said. For the first time she undressed her own child. He wakened, and seeing a strange face bending over him, cried, but she soon soothed him to sleep again. Then she went and stood by her dead friend.

"I hope you know"—Daisy whispered softly close in her ear—"I hope you know

that it is as you prayed it might be—that the mother's heart is wakened in me, and that I will live for my child. I hope you know."

And then it seemed to Daisy, from whose eyes tears were freely streaming, as if the dead lips smiled. Daisy did not see any one but the old woman that night. Her friend's husband was sleeping the first heavy slumber of profound mental and physical exhaustion. Daisy, having drunk some broth old Keziah brought her,—saying, "It's good, I knows, I made it for her," pointing to the room where the dead woman lay,—threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, beside her child, with no expectation of sleep, no wish for it. But she did sleep till morning, and woke to find yesterday no dream. She kept still, for the little one still slept; she gazed at it worshipfully. This morning she began to think of Kenneth Stewart, and though he and his love for her still seemed to stand afar off, to be

long ago, she wept for him. If her way had been made simple and straight, her life enriched with a priceless gift, what sorrow was piled up in his! He had held her always in a sort of shrine, and now what would he have to learn to think her? Towards him her conduct had been so cruelly deceitful, so miserably selfish and cowardly—she had never known it so plainly as now. She wept for him very bitterly, and, in simple language, prayed for him—that "he might not mind so very much."

The day to which Daisy had wakened was Sunday. Within the house the presence of death caused an unearthly-seeming stillness, and outside the house was the heavenly quiet of a stainless, stirless Autumn morning. In such country as that about Moor-Edge, still, sunny, Autumn weather has a profound and peculiar charm. Its calm seems to flow from billow to billow along the uplands, and to fill up the measure of the valleys, and

to have at once a breadth, a substance, and a spirituality unknown at lower levels.

Daisy, opening her window early, and looking out over a tract of shining moorland, down upon plains and valleys, felt both awed and soothed by the silent, soft radiance of the world. But by-and-by the little one woke hungry, and Daisy made haste to take it downstairs. Early as it was, breakfast was set ready for her and the child in the little sitting-room she used to call hers when she stayed at Moor-Edge.

Daisy's first most important care in the world was to feed the little one with its bread and milk, her greatest delight to find that he would take his food from her hand uncomplainingly, though seriously and sadly, and with eyes that sought about wistfully for the familiar face.

"Poor master's up and out," Keziah told her. "The funeral's to be after to-morrow. I most fear it'll be the death of

him to see her taken away. Ah, but she was a good woman, if ever there was one." A pause, and the old woman's apron was passed across her face. "The child's taken to you wonderful," she then went on. "It's not a child like just any other child, as you'll find; it has strange ways with it. She didn't use to think it would live. Look to it now, ma'am; wouldn't you think it know'd each word we're saying, and more, and could talk most sensible-like if it chose? But it's never spoken, not one word."

As Daisy looked the child returned her gaze with a searching earnestness; then the mouth and chin quivered, the eyes filled, and the face was suddenly turned and hidden in Daisy's bosom, seeking shelter with the cause of fear.

"You know he's my own child?" Daisy asked, jealously. "I'm a widow, and he's my own child. I was mad when I said I wouldn't own him. My own child, my own darling!"

"The mistress told me—when she knew she was dying she told me—I was to do about everything as you bid me; but she said she was sure you'd own the child, that you wouldn't leave him motherless."

"I'm a widow, and he's my son—all the world may know it," said Daisy, proudly. "He's my own, own, own beautiful boy!" she added to herself and to the child.

All the morning Daisy sat in the great corn-field with her child on her knees, or strolled about it, carrying him in her arms. After dinner she took him out again. All thought spared from him was given to Kenneth Stewart; but, indeed, so foolishly was she engrossed by this new and wonderful toy, that the day was almost done before she knew. It was no use to write to-day, there was no post; to-night, while her child slept, she would write, she thought.

The day was declining in the same perfect calm, the same serene radiance, with which the morning had dawned. Just now and

then, the bell of a distant hill-side chapel dropped out a note; now and then the child made little inarticulate noises; now and then came some Sunday sound from the farm-yard. Would all her life, foolish Daisy wondered, be as peaceful and as satisfied, now she had given herself to her child, as this day had been?

"And will my darling love me always, always love me?" she bowed her face over the child and asked.

Between them and the sunlight a shadow crossed, as between them and last night's moonlight a shadow had crossed. Half in play and half by accident the boy's hand had entangled itself in Daisy's drooping hair. When she freed herself and looked up, no one was in sight. Yet this time the falling of that shadow made her shiver. Daisy fancied the evening was turning cold; she made haste to carry the child in-doors. With long lingering kisses on his face, his neck, his hair, his pretty hands, she trusted him for a time

to the care of the old woman, who sat in sad Sunday leisure crying by the kitchen fire.

Yet once more Daisy wandered out. Within walls there seemed no room to think. A new idea had taken hold of her, that she ought to go to Mr. Stewart, to speak, not to write what she had to say. Daisy blushed at herself at last, remembering what foolish fond thoughts about her child had filled much of a day during which Kenneth, who loved her so, must have been suffering some keen anxiety. She had been planning to get for her child all manner of beautiful clothes—first, such pretty thick white embroidered frocks, then little suits of "real velvet," with tiny buttons of "real gold"—had been indulging in such dreams as a child might dream about her favourite doll, while Kenneth——

"Oh, what a fool I am! what a selfish fool," Daisy cried, with burning cheeks. "A coward, too. I shrink from seeing his pain,

but he won't suffer more because I see him suffer. I think, indeed, he will suffer less, from spoken than from written words. I will go to him. But can I? Who, now she has gone, will take care of my child, all the long hours I shall need to be away?"

A tall shadow of some one coming towards her round the shoulder of the field, touched her feet. A few seconds after, she and Mr. Stewart stood face to face. Daisy flushed, and paled, and flushed again.

"You have found me, then?"

"Yes, I have found you."

"You startled me very much. I was just thinking of you. I was just resolving to go back to you, to tell you something that I thought you would rather hear than read. To tell you something, and——" this added with a faltering voice, "to ask you to forgive me, and to bid you good-bye."

"I don't think there is much you need to tell me, Daisy. I was here last night

before you. I saw you last night in the moonlight; I saw you this afternoon in the sunshine. I don't think there is much you need to tell me, Daisy."

"You saw me with my son, then," said Daisy, with a sort of despairing pride. "Then there is no need to tell I am a mother, and have been a wife; but how I was trapped into being Graham's wife, and how I thought I should always loathe and hate the child that was his child, and yet that now I love it, love it, love it—— Only I can tell you these things, Kenneth."

"Why were they not told sooner, Daisy? What had I done that you could not trust me?"

There was something in the simple-seeming words, or in the tone and look with which he spoke them, that brought her, before he could hinder, to the ground at his feet.

"Have pity! Don't speak to me like

that. Don't look at me like that, as if I had broken your heart."

He lifted her from the ground and placed her once more on the sheaves where she had been sitting with the child. A moment she gazed up at him, then she covered her face, and burst into a passion of tears. His face worked convulsively as he watched her. When she seemed, for the time, to have exhausted her power of weeping, he said, very gently,

"And so, Daisy, you never loved me?"

That roused her.

"I always loved you; even before I ever thought you loved me, I loved you!"

"That I cannot understand."

"You are not a woman and a coward! You don't understand how, even to myself, I tried to pretend that what was so loathsome in the past, had not been. And could I speak of it? And to you?"

"It seems you could not, so I say no more."

"Have pity! Don't speak so, don't look so, don't mind so much! I was never worth your having, Kenneth. You know it now. And now that I am not any longer alone, now that I have come to love my little child, you'll try to forget me, Kenneth; promise you'll try to forget me."

"For yourself then, Daisy, you now feel the child enough?"

For answer she suddenly dropped her face into her hands. Already, having again seen Kenneth's face, and heard his voice, she knew that the child was not enough. There was a silence of some length. The pale Autumn sun had softly faded from out the sky, from off the earth. The mists lay lake-like in the valleys. Out of a profound quiet, and sounding as if from far away, came Kenneth's voice, asking:

"And what life, Daisy, do you now propose to yourself?"

"Just to go away somewhere with my child. Just to live always for my child."

The words, even to herself, had an inexpressibly dreary ring in them, though they were spoken in a soft and tender voice.

"And you think you are fit for that, poor Daisy?" No answer. "And though the child may be enough for you, are you enough for the child?"

"God helping me, I hope to be so," she said, very humbly.

"Daisy," and there was a choking in his voice, "I can't bear it. Get up, dear, and come with me. Come indoors, to some place where we can talk quietly. There is much to be spoken between us, and the evening is chill."

He held his hands to her and lifted her up. They passed together into the house, and into the little parlour. A bright wood-fire burned cheerily, and the tea was set ready. Daisy wondered where the child was; but she tried to put him out of her thoughts, and to fix her whole attention upon Mr. Stewart, and what he had to say.

For all else there would be time afterwards, when she had parted from Kenneth for ever. It was already just so dusk indoors that she could not see the expression of Mr. Stewart's face, which was turned from the light. And for so long he did not speak! She bore this silence while she could; then, when she could no longer bear it, with the words, "Kenneth, Kenneth, can't you forgive me?—can't you?" she slipped to the ground, a second time, at his feet; this time she wound her arms about them, and laid her face upon them. She was soon caught up and replaced upon the little sofa.

"Forgive me, if I seem cold and hard," he said. "All this is a great shock to me, Daisy, a great shock. For the time I seem to have lost both you and myself." And then, forgetting he had already put this question, he asked, "And what is it, Daisy, that you now propose to do?"

"To go away somewhere—to some

place where nobody knows me—with my child."

"That is much easier said than done, Daisy. And, Daisy, it is not the right thing to do. You don't wish to throw suspicion on your son's birth? To injure his prospects in life, if he should live, and grow to manhood?"

"What is it you mean, Kenneth?" she questioned, with anxious humility.

"I mean that by living under false colours as you have, and by keeping your marriage a secret as you have, an amount of harm both to yourself and to your child, that it will be difficult to undo, has been done. You don't understand to what you would expose yourself, and the injury you would be doing your child, if you persevered in an at all similar course of conduct."

Daisy pondered, with the hot colour coming and going on her cheek."

"If he lives and grows up, you would wish him to be a gentleman among gentle-

men, to take the position his birth entitles him to?"

Daisy shuddered, but answered: "Of course I would not wish to injure my own child. What must I do, Kenneth? You will advise me. You know, only too well, how foolish I am."

"Too foolish to take care even of yourself, Daisy, and yet you would undertake the sole charge of a child who may grow to be a man."

Daisy's attention wandered from the subject in hand. "Why, Kenneth, do you speak so doubtfully about my child's living and growing up?"

"Isn't a child's living and growing up always a matter for doubt?"

A moment's pause;—then Daisy answered what he had said before,—

"There are many foolish mothers, Kenneth, whose children take no harm. I suppose God helps them! Don't tell me I must not have my child. I am not wise and

good, I know, but I love it, and it has no one else."

"Having to choose between us, you choose the child. You say you loved me, and yet, after a few kisses given to this child, after a few hours, during which it has been in your arms, having to choose between us, you choose the child."

"Kenneth, don't torture me. You know there is no choice. Don't tear my life in two, trying to make me believe there is a choice."

"Your heart still clings to me a little then, Daisy?"

"For the first time since I've known you, you're cruel!—and it's a cruel time to be cruel! Even if my child did not need me, what could I now be to you? But my child does need me. I choose my child. I must go away with it. I will hide myself with it."

"There must be no hiding, Daisy. Everything must be open, and in the face of day.

I've told you why this must be. You must take your husband's name at once, for the sake of your husband's son."

"To call him that, my husband's son! is as if you tried to make me hate him," Daisy said, passionately.

"You know I would not wish to do that. I have seen him, pretty, harmless little fellow. Your choice is made to keep him, and mine is made to take you and him into my keeping. I won't pretend it was made without a struggle. But once made, it is made."

Daisy paused before she spoke.

"That can never be," she then said, firmly. "You used to call me your flower, but I have been trampled into the mud, crushed into it! I will not be picked up and worn upon your breast."

"Yes, Daisy, you will. I will tell you why you will. All is different from what I had dreamt and hoped. For the present all the joy is gone out of life. Angry with

you, poor child, I am not. How can I be? But all is changed. Nevertheless, more than ever you needed me, you now need me. You are entirely unable to bear the brunt and the burden of life with your child. I am entirely unable, because you are still so dear to me, to leave you to do so. You must be my wife, Daisy, sheltered under my name. You will not refuse me, because only so can I have any ease or rest."

"No, Kenneth, no; don't set your will on this. It is not fit. I am so utterly unfit. I could go so far away that our paths need never cross, and in time, thinking of me as happy with my boy, you would be able to forget me. I could go abroad. I would take his name if you think I ought. Why should I not be safe, living as a widow with my son?"

"Daisy, don't waste your strength and mine. Believe me, I know best what is best for both of us, for all three of us. Since

you are not to be parted from your child, I take the child with you. It has a look of you in its face, Daisy, and of your Wattie. I won't be unkind to it."

"What folly to tell me that," she said, laughing and crying. "You unkind to a child—to anything!"

"To *his* child I could find it in my heart to be murderously unkind, but for that look of you and of Wattie," he said, passionately.

"I can't help feeling that one day you will repent, Kenneth. I can't help fearing I am wrong if—I shall be wroug if I yield."

"Leave off feeling and bélieving for the present," he said, "and just rest here," opening his arms to her, "and tell me all about it. I must know; there shall be no dark corners any more. If you can bear to tell me now, I would like to be told at once."

He sat by her, and put his arm round her, rather in support than in tenderness. Perhaps if she had known half of what was in

his mind she would never have yielded. Yet the result of it all was just this—just what he had told her—that he felt his protection indispensable to her, and that he still loved her so truly and deeply that there could be for him no ease of heart or life unless he had her in his care. That was the result of it all; but he knew that for this he would pay a price. Though Daisy was blameless, no doubt, of all but the weak folly of concealment, that weak folly would prove to have drawn upon her fair name such a cloud of suspicious-seeming mystery, as it would be intensely painful to any man should rest upon the antecedents of his wife. He sat beside her in the fire-lighted dusk, half hiding his face with one hand, and listened to her story. What the story was we know; what it was to him to hear, and to her to tell him, it was not easy to know. Once or twice she faltered, almost failed in power to speak.

"Must I go on?" she asked.

"If you can you had better, Daisy; it will be well to have it told and over."

"Yes," she answered meekly, and then soon continued. When she came to the finding Wattie lying drowned on the river-side grass, to the vow she had vowed kneeling by him, she broke into passionate weeping. "Kenneth, Kenneth, help me to forget it all."

He strained her to him then, with soothing words.

"Courage, it will soon be over; and then, indeed, poor Daisy, I will help you to forget it all."

Nearer the end, when she had to speak of her husband's treatment of her, a literal holding her in hell, as it seemed to both of them, it was Mr. Stewart who, for a moment, interrupted her story, starting up with some inarticulate exclamation. She pleaded then—

"Let me spare you and myself, let me leave the rest untold."

"No, Daisy. All you can bear to tell I wish to hear. I am not a woman to stop my ears from hearing. It is not the horror of the thing itself, it is the horror of your having suffered it. Don't you understand?"

"Oh! yes—I know. But, Kenneth, can you believe what I tell you? I, as I tell it, don't believe it. Surely his badness was madness. It doesn't seem to me possible that the same world that holds you can have held him. And, oh! Kenneth, indeed, indeed, it is not possible that I, who was his, should be yours!"

"You were not his," he said, almost roughly.

"My soul was not his, my will was not; but only if I could be passed through fire, and so purified, could I bear that you should take me."

She came at last to the very end. The report of the pistol, the feeling something on her hands and face, the looking at something, not knowing what she saw. And then

—not supported now by the fever-strength that, the first time she told the story, had borne her through—indeed, it had been told in a changed and softened spirit, nurse's words, "It may be God's will you should remember and forgive," occurred to her; there was half excuse in the way in which she had said, "Surely his badness was madness"—she sank against Kenneth in a deadly swoon.

"I have tried her too much!" Mr. Stewart said, remorsefully, as he laid her on the couch. "Heaven help us both!" he added, as he looked down on her death-like face, and almost thought it might be better for them both if she never woke.

Her first words when she came to herself were, "And now, Kenneth, you know that I am right—that it is not possible that you should take me for your wife."

"A pearl is always a pearl, however foul the mud in which for a time it may have been lost," was his only answer then. He

would not let her talk. He called old Keziah to come and wait upon her, and he left her. He himself walked over miles and miles of moorland. "To the edge of the world and back," he told Daisy, whom he saw again that night for a few moments, before he went to the little inn at which he was staying. "And I'm come back unchanged, Daisy," he added.

And the ending of this story was according to his will. Not exactly "a happy ending," but yet an ending that held the possible beginning of happier things. All the days of her life, both stormy days and sunny days, Daisy loved her husband as perfectly as it was in her to do anything.

For a long time Daisy's child was thought to be dumb. It had a dumb look in its gentle face—a pathetic, struggling look. But at last it learned to talk, not till it was five years old, just enough to prove that it was not, mentally, like other children. Rough and careless tongues named it an

idiot; but it was not that. Then it died. Unfit to lead anything but a child's life, requiring to be always cared for as a child, when with its childhood its life ended, even the mother, in her first bitter grief, though conscious that a vacant place was left which nothing could ever fill, felt "It is well. It would have been so terrible to die, and leave him without a mother."

And Myrrha? Myrrha was Aunt Daisy's bridesmaid. Myrrha was triumphant. "I told you so, Mr. Stewart! I told you Aunt Daisy was, I believed, already married!" Myrrha lived with "Aunt and Uncle Stewart". till she herself married. Perhaps Myrrha lost some of her "wisdom" at Redcombe. When she married it was only a fair match, not a splendid one, and she was "in love."

Myrrha was disappointed in herself, rather ashamed of herself. Aunt Daisy did what she could to console her, and Myrrha was open to consolation that came to her in the shape of a liberal and fashionable outfit, and

all kinds of beautiful and costly presents. Myrrha's husband had the prettiest and most stylish woman in the neighbourhood for his wife. That "they got on very well together" was the history they gave of their married happiness.

"I DO NOT LOVE YOU."

"I DO NOT LOVE YOU."

CHAPTER I.

SHE was leaning in the window of that cold, comfortless room—she would lean there, though he had tried to draw her away. She was a slight, frail-looking creature; her form and her attitude suggested pliability, and told of long-settled despondency. Twining a scarlet thread round and round her finger, she gazed out with unflinching persistence. There was nothing to see—the dismal evening was falling upon the wet street of a dull country town after a raw drizzling Autumn day.

He stood half behind, half beside her—just enough withdrawn to be hidden from passers-by—and watched the pale drooping profile and the restless fingers. His face—that of a man no longer young—was proud, passionate, and resolute; so were his words.; and the impatient movements by which he now and then changed his posture, were evident kickings against and revoltings at the pricks which lay between him and the accomplishment of his will. He looked a man unused to be resisted, and whom nothing could so much chafe as the mere fact of defeat, let the object of the struggle have been what it might.

"Give some sign that you, at least, hear me," he said.

As he spoke he possessed himself of an end of that scarlet thread, and twitched it from her hold, thinking by this to rouse her. Thus sharply withdrawn, it cut through the delicate skin; but neither of them noticed it. The movements of the small

hands continued to be much the same as before its withdrawal.

After a pause—during which he watched her with an expression of exasperation growing over his face—he put his hands on her shoulders, turning her towards him, drawing her from the window by a more decided action than he had used before.

"Have you heard anything I have said?" he asked, as she lifted her mournful eyes to his with a pleading look, while her wan face told of utter weariness, of heart-ache, of despair.

"Yes, all. I have heard all."

"You have nothing to say? No answer to make?"

"Only the same words to say, the old answer to make; the words you have heard so often—the words I hardly dare say to you again—the words that are so true, so dreadfully true, though I have prayed lately—only God knows how fervently—for your sake to be able to believe them false.

I do not love you—I do not love you—I do not love you."

"Why echo the hateful sound?" he cried, catching her clay-cold hands—which she was wringing as if in an agony of impotence—in one of his. "To hear those words once is punishment enough for a life of sin, and against you at least I have not sinned. Why echo them? Have I not heard them often enough already to make them ring through my life, sleeping and waking?"

"Give me no cause to speak again. Be merciful! Leave my soul free. If you asked me for anything I could give you, were it my life——"

"It is just for that, for your life, that I do ask you."

"But you want it in a way I cannot, cannot give it. I have no life to give in that way."

"Mere sophistry! You *can* give me all I ask for—give me yourself. Life must be very precious to you still since you love it so

dearly that you will not trust it to my keeping."

"I cannot. You want my life, you say, therefore you want my live self—you want my heart, my soul; and I could only give you what is dead; a dead heart, or just an empty shell—no heart, no soul at all; for," she whispered the last words, "you know that I do not love you, you know even more than that."

"Leave me to judge of what I want," he answered. "Yield your will to mine. With what comes after—let come what may—I will never reproach you. Marry me, give me the right to care for you,—never speak those hateful words again. I ask no more from you than this—this you can do."

"You cannot bear to hear those words just simply spoken now and then by a being you can leave when you weary of her presence. How will you bear to feel them, see them in all ways, be made conscious of their truth daily, hourly, on and on, for all

the time we are both compelled to stay on earth? How will you bear to have my daily life, day by day, telling you, 'I do not love you?'"

His grasp of her clasped hands tightened till pain sent a crimson flush over her face. It passed away quickly, and she gave no other sign. She knew why he frowned as she finished speaking. She did not know why he had smiled so strangely before he frowned. She had said "will" where she should have said "would," and he had built upon this slight foundation. In spite of that frown, he now spoke gently, and with an extreme tenderness softening all his face, saying,

"I hardly recognise my tender-hearted little friend to-day; she seems causelessly and wilfully cruel. But I answer your cruel questions thus, Lily—I shall not have to bear such torture as you suggest. You *shall* love me. I feel that the power, might, and heat of my love will absolutely conquer

and subdue you. You turn whiter, and you shudder; but I say it shall be so."

A faint smile, half pitying, half incredulous, flickered over her face.

"And I say," she answered, "that my heart is gone out of me, is beyond your power, as it is beyond mine; that there is an obstinate spirit in me beyond your power, and beyond mine; that, if I hated you, I could do nothing to you more cruel than consent to your will; that you had better dig up a corpse from the graveyard, and take that to your heart, than make a woman your wife who knows surely and irresistibly, as I do, that she does not, cannot love you."

She spoke vehemently, and as if from a sort of inspiration; but then she sickened, and the strength left her limbs. She was not in any way equal to a struggle of will with him. It was only his grasp of her hands that now kept her from sinking in a heap at his feet. He gathered her into his

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could give her, he set his will firmer and firmer towards winning her.

He knew that to what she had long borne would now be added insult and contumely, probably dismissal and disgrace, and that for her these would be a sentence of starvation. He did not reproach himself—he had taken all reasonable precautions. They had been surprised, her retreat had been cut off; it was not his fault, he could not be sorry that circumstances conspired to further his will.

His will! Had he not set his will at least as much as his heart on conquering the resistance of a weak woman? and in setting that will above her pure woman's instinct, did he not tacitly show that he valued his love above the Omnipotent Love to the shelter of which he would not trust her? rather than that, drawing her from it, into what was—for her, because she felt it to be so—sin.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN she had been some time alone, and the life that had ebbed very low in her had slowly flowed back, Lily Winters set herself to think and decide. This was foolish and dangerous; while she trusted to instinct and feeling she was comparatively safe; reason and reflection were less reliable guides. Is this unsound doctrine? I will not preach it, then, as a gospel of general application, only say that as for Lily Winters so for many women—let moral teachers and philosophers say what they will—feeling is a safer guide than reflection, instinct than reason.

She seated herself on one of the forms, leaning both elbows on the desk in front,

buried her hands in her clustering hair, pushing it back from her brow, and set herself to think. She had two hours before her—the last two hours of a week's holiday during which the little girls, her pupils, had been absent on a visit.

When one hour, perhaps, of those two had expired—she was not conscious that more than a few moments had passed—Lily rose,—standing upon a wooden stool, for she was but a little woman, and the mirror was hung high,—and looked at herself in the clouded glass. It gave no flattering reflection. Look over her shoulder, and see a small face of rather dingy pallor, the lower part of it expressing just now a sort of struggle between spiritual firmness and tenacity and intellectual and physical weakness of will. The upper part of it, with its large gentle eyes that look as if they had wept away their brightness, and learned to fear always, is fine in a curious, half-elfish, and yet tenderly human way. The figure looks older

than the face—Lily stooped, and often seemed to be shrinking away from the world—but it is not ungraceful; has even, through its suggestion of timid helplessness, its own peculiar charm: it is perverted now, rather than represented by an ill-made, ill-fitting, and very shabby dress.

"You were rather pretty once," said Lily to her own face. "But now——why can't he just leave me alone to fade? I look blighted, that is what I look. I shall soon drop off my stalk. It is because I am meant for this, and not for life, that I cannot forget—cannot forget."

Those last words she repeated many times: after she had turned from the glass and sat down again she repeated them, wringing her tiny hands as she uttered them. How hard she tried to pass her whole life in review—to think it all over; but there were places in which her mind hung as in a choked-up groove. She was not much past thirty, but she had lived her life, as far as

love, hope, and joy made part of it. She had loved, and she had hoped with all her power. She had learned to say "*had* hoped," but could not learn to say "*had* loved;" her power of loving and living would leave her together. She had known sharp changes of fortune, but of this she neither felt nor thought. She cared nothing for luxury or even comfort. It seemed as if her heart had suffered so much that for a little frail body there was no measure nor means of suffering left.

She had been a petted only child, and an heiress; now she was an orphan—absolutely poor, and absolutely friendless, save for that man who had just left her—a man who had always loved her as a child, girl, woman, as she had loved another—a man to whom her parents had owed salvation from ruin, and the peace and ease of their last days; a man, however, from whom she could take nothing, unless she took everything. If she did this, what could she give him in return?

Nothing, she said: everything, he declared. He had shown by his life that he could not learn to forget her, to have an existence in which she had no part. The love which, unknown to her, had strengthened in him slowly, year by year, had mastered him now. He knew all the story of her love—or almost all—and it made no difference. She had begun to feel lately that there was no escape for her; that she was in the power of his inflexible will; that all of her that was tangible he would grasp and hold. She had thought of flight, but the thing was, there was no escape from consciousness of his suffering, and of the heavy, heavy debt of gratitude she owed. "Life does not leave me as quickly as I believed it would," she thought. "It cannot keep in me long—but yet some years, perhaps. I am not more weak and ailing now than I was last Autumn. Are there any in the world so miserable that they have no power to give some happiness to another? Is it

for this that life lingers in me, that I should try and do some good to him? I have lived my life for myself; but is there any life in me that I could live for him? I do not love him; but could I serve him as if I did? He is alone, as I am; more alone than I am. There is the danger. Am I enough, alone, to make him feel less alone? He starves in his luxury, he says: he says that he wears his soul out with craving, so that his life is useless, and he might as well not have been born. This is not true: I hear of noble actions that he does; but the misery is that he feels it true. He never loses the consciousness, he tells me, that his heart, as he says I am, is outside in cold and desolation. If I let him take me in, to live under his roof, in his sight, will this bring him any of the ease, and rest, and happiness he thinks? I do not know—not this or anything."

Poor Lily! She grew more and more perplexed—losing sight of the fixed immut-

able truth that she had recognized as truth when she only felt.

A little flicker of feverish warmth came nto th e ash-pale cheeks as she contemplated the sacrifice of herself, and dreamed of the possibility of making one who suffered, with that suffering of the heart which alone she was inclined to own as suffering, less unhappy.

"Be quiet," she whispered. "This is mere selfishness." That was when she was again conscious of the inner voice pleading —"But I do not love him—I do not love him."

It had long been dark out-doors, but the room was not dark; the light of the street-lamp outside fell across the floor. Lily's two hours had more than flown when the door opened, and a woman, large, handsome, and handsomely dressed, entered, a candle in her hand. She swept up to Lily, so close that it seemed as if she meant to sweep over her, and set her candle down upon the

table. Lily had risen, startled by the sudden entrance, dazzled by the sudden light; she was not reassured by the expression of that handsome face, swollen and inflamed by anger.

"I beg your pardon for not being downstairs to receive the young ladies," she began. "I did not know it was so late. I will go directly and put them to bed."

"Stop!" her mistress commanded. "No wonder you 'did not know it was so late,' so well employed as you have been! But I did not come to speak to you about those neglects of duty to which I am so accustomed from you" (that was quite untrue, Lily was scrupulous and conscientious), "but to ask you a question. Are you engaged to Mr. Elphinstone, Miss Winters?"

"Madam!"

"I intend to have an answer. Are you engaged to Mr. Elphinstone, Miss Winters?"

Lily's large, mournful eyes met the furious

look fixed on them with gentle wonder.

"I am not," she answered; her soft sweet voice contrasting strongly with the harsh hoarse tones of the question.

"I thought it not possible, yet anything else seemed as unlikely." Mrs. Maston glanced with insolent contempt at the little faded creature in the shabby dress, and shook out her own ample, rustling skirts. "Yet I have heard what I am forced to believe, and what obliges me to request that you leave this house immediately—to-night—within an hour! I will permit no further intercourse between you and my little girls—do not dare to attempt to see them again."

Lily, perceiving that her mistress was waiting to hear if she had anything to say, choked down some strong emotion, and murmured,

"Let me kiss Effie again, only let me kiss little Effie once more." She was a poor-spirited creature, you see. Her request was

denied, and Mrs. Maston swept out. The handsome widow was almost mad with jealousy. She had played so hard, and she thought so skilfully, to win Mr. Elphinstone. She had taken Lily (whom she disliked from the time she first saw her) into her house to please him, and had never dreamt of finding a rival in "that mean-looking little creature." Something had lately aroused her suspicion; she had set one of her maids to watch, and now she knew of Mr. Elphinstone's visits to the governess, and that this evening he had been seen holding her in his arms.

Lily stood where she had been left. It was dark and late. "Where shall I go?" she asked herself. She was timid; the fact that it was dark and late moved her to a quickened sense of misery and desolation. For its being cold and wet—she heard the rain driven against the window furiously—she did not care. Within the prescribed time Lily left the place; she had remembered

one possible refuge—with an old servant whose house she thought she could find—if not, where could she go? She had no money.

CHAPTER III.

IT was in Sarah Green's small kitchen that Mr. Elphinstone found Lily next day. She was straining her eyes to catch the last light from the dim window, and hurting her weak hands with coarse needle-work. She had looked almost happy; feeling all day as if she breathed more freely, as if the fresher air from a new life opening before her were blown upon her bracingly. But her face changed when she heard his knock; she gave a shuddering sigh. Having admitted Mr. Elphinstone, and set a chair for him, her companion went out, leaving them together.

The shock of the evening before had

roused some courage in Lily. Night had brought her counsel. Having prayed to be delivered from temptation, the way had seemed to grow clear before her. She would go away with Sarah Green—Mr. Elphinstone should not know where—oh, it pained her to pain him! but, with her cleared vision, she had seen that this was the shortest and most endurable pain she could give him—from a distance she would write to him in a way that even he should feel to be final. In the night, after she had prayed, it had been so visible to her that his will was not the will of God for either of them.

And now—she dropped her work and clasped her hands, and set her lips resolutely. If she should have to yield she would struggle first; but, admitting by that "if" the possibility of this yielding, was she not already lost? When he came in she had glanced up at him, but neither of them had spoken; he had read something of her

purpose in her face and in her occupation. Now he sat and looked into the fire till Lily felt afraid of the silence and of his face.

"You heard I had left my place," she said. "I meant to have written to you to say good-bye, and to try to thank you for——"

She faltered. How could she ever thank him? What was it she had to thank him for? So much—everything. And how was she going to pay him?

"Where are you going?" he asked, turning upon her almost savagely.

"I hardly know yet. I have not quite arranged my plans."

She tried to seem unmoved, but she felt her soul flinch from the expression of his face as he asked,

"Is there no pity in your heart, Lily?"

Nevertheless, she spoke bravely, and according to the truth, of which she still kept some hold.

"Oh! yes, so much—if you only knew! —so much, that I will save you from yourself—from the life-long torture you propose for yourself. It is not only that" (she lowered her voice as she came to these words) "I do not love you; but I cannot, cannot, cannot" (the words wrung out) "forget; I go on loving. He is somewhere. Sometimes I almost believe, in spite of my knowledge that it is not possible, that he is on earth still; but if not on earth, he is in heaven. Love reaches heaven. Life here is only a little piece out of something that was before, and will be after. I go on loving. I love him—I love him; and I do not, cannot love you!"

Mr. Elphinstone sprang up. He said nothing, but he moved about the place, grating the sanded floor under his feet. Was he moved or shaken? Lily watched him with clasped hands, parted lip, quivering nostrils. Did he feel that her last appeal was made? Would he yield? If not,

what was the will of a woman against that of such a man? Presently he stood before her. He had been shaken, but he would not yield.

"I thank you, Lily, for being wise for me," he began; and what the peculiar inflection of his voice meant she could not tell. "But I know myself better than a girl like you can know me. Life, and the world too, I know a little more really than you can do. Were there the faintest shadow of the possibility of the truth of what you suggested just now, I would leave you to wait your life out, and never urge you to do anything but wait. You believe this?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"But you know there is not that faintest shadow."

"Not as far as man can judge; but with God, you know, all things are possible."

"We have to do with human possibility; we are agreed there is none. Now I will

tell you what your seamstress scheme means —for you, slow, sure starvation, and shameful danger; for me, a most exquisitely ingenious torture. You see and feel that I am calm and dispassionate now. I have weighed everything judicially. It is impossible that I should give you up. We are both miserable through some great mistake in life. I know that you can mitigate life for me (I plead in this way, Lily, as the only way to reach your heart), and I believe that in doing this your own misery will find its greatest possible, only possible alleviation. In living for my happiness you will most nearly approach your own. You are a woman, Lily, and not a very hard one. I am a man, and love youwith a strong man's power. I shall prevail—you shall love me! We shall yet be happy. Good heavens! for all men there is some happiness somewhere in their lives, surely. What have I known of this yet? After what I have suffered—living

with my heart hung out as a mark for the blows and scorns of the world, and not able to move a finger for its protection—will it not be happiness to hold it as a jewel enclosed?—to know you, feel you, see you, hear you under the shelter of my roof? Rest will enter my heart when you enter my doors; if you live there and hate me, I shall have more peace than if you were indifferent to me anywhere else in the world. But you will not hate me."

He looked down upon her, his face aglow with resolute heat. She, a pale, scared thing, looked up at him, powerless. Her will yielded, but not her heart. Her reason yielded, but not her heart; but the poor thing, her heart, was borne down, laid low, and felt the waves break over it.

"I will try to make you happy," she said, after a long silence; "I will live to serve you." Then one last cry was audibly cried by her soul. "Oh! Ralph, have you *prayed?* It seems to me that you are tempting me to

sin—dragging us both down to an unknown depth of misery."

He smiled, laid his hand on her head soothingly, then gently pressed it over her strained eyes, which looked, in their intensity, as if the vexed soul might fly forth through them.

"Where can be your sin, my pure Lily? You sacrifice yourself to me. In the truest sense, you lay down your life for your friend —I am your friend, you know; you have always granted me that title. For the misery—we will prove it."

CHAPTER IV.

ON a June day in the following year, little Mrs. Elphinstone was sunning herself on the terrace outside the window of her sitting-room. Her hand was full of roses; below her was her rose-garden, beyond that, the sunny slopes of the park stretched away to the beech-woods, shining in early Summer sun-steeped green.

A very fair scene, and she looked a fair little woman. Her bright clustering hair glistened in the sunshine; her cheeks were rounder than they used to be, and had a tinge of colour, and her morning-dress was graceful and pretty. There was certainly

just then more appearance of physical well-being about Mrs. Elphinstone than there had been for long years about Lily Winters; but for the rest——

What did her husband think? Unknown to her, he was watching her now. He called her; she started at his voice, and came towards him hurriedly.

"You want me?"

"It is nothing important; there is no reason you should look frightened."

He stood in the window, blocking it up so that she could not immediately go in. He put his hand on her head as she stood in the sunshine, and bending it back, perused her face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I am trying to discover; I have been trying great part of the morning. Lily, I wish you would cure yourself of some things——"

"Tell me what things, Ralph."

She stooped forward, to put her roses in-

side the room, and to withdraw her head from the pressure of his hand.

"Amongst others, of starting when I call you, and of that strange trick you have of widening your eyes and lifting your brows when I speak to you, in a way that makes you look like some poor wild creature that has been caught and caged, but never tamed. These things are very painful to me—that expression especially."

"It is very painful to me to be so watched! I wish, Ralph, you would not do it; you make me so nervous that I am almost afraid to move, and then I do all the more the things I try not to do. You cannot think how hard I try to please you."

She had spoken pettishly—a thing she did very seldom; now she paused, looked up into his face, then covered her own, and burst into tears. He had rarely known her to do this; in general her misery was dry-eyed.

Some long-untouched chords of her being

had been made to vibrate that morning. As she looked upon the early Summer beauty of the world, a feeling had come over her that life was worth having while there could be moments in which the outward beauty of the universe made unmarred music in the soul. This feeling had come over her while she was spell-bound—held by a sort of dream, during which she lived back in that time when want and loss and emptiness had made up her existence, and her misery had been negative. Her husband's voice sounded a sudden awakening, and sent a jarring vibration through her. Less on her guard, less under her own control than usual, feeling the chains that bound her more, because for a time she had forgotten them, she burst into tears, and cried:

"Oh, I am miserable!—for I know now that I was right—that I make you more and more miserable."

"Hush!" he whispered, and he drew her

hands away from her face, and drew her into the room. "No tears now. I came to tell you of a visitor, before whom, if you see her at all, you must make a show of happiness. Mrs. Maston is here. Acting with her usual assurance, she has dared come to see you. Do you choose to receive her? One of the children is with her. Why, one would think you had loved the woman, to see your face now!"

"Not her, but little Effie. Is it little Effie who is with her? I did love little Effie, and she loved me."

"I think it is Effie who is with her. You will find them in the drawing-room."

Lily was hurrying from the room, when, looking in the mirror to see that her face told no tale of tears, she caught the expression of Mr. Elphinstone's. Her aspect changed directly. She calmed herself, went and stood before him, demure and quiet. For a moment there had shone from her face something of the

girlish radiance he remembered to have seen upon it long, long years ago; now, as she stood before him, she was wholly Mrs. Elphinstone, restrained and cautious, studiously considerate of his will.

"You would rather I did not see Mrs. Maston," she said. "Effie is nothing to me if you do not wish me to see her."

"Nothing is anything to you, I know," he answered, bitterly. "I know that you are all duty and submission, but I am not quite such a tyrant as you make me out. I do not want your life to be nothing but a series of small sacrifices supplementing the great one." He tried to speak lightly after the first outburst. "Come, we will go together," he said, smiled, and drew her hand through his arm.

Lily was not deceived. She had no pleasure in the wild caresses of the child, who bounded towards her when she opened the door, and, in spite of all her mother's previous schooling, hung upon her neck.

Her husband was not watching them; he studiously avoided doing so. He was talking graciously to the handsome widow, but she knew, by past experience, that he heard and saw and felt all she did and said; and this knowledge made her kiss the pretty child stealthily, as if to do so were a crime. But Effie was not to be repulsed or kept in check. When Mrs. Elphinstone was seated, she sprang upon her lap, and, to her mother's admonition not to be so troublesome, answered:

"This is not being troublesome; Miss Winters used to like to have me here. She loved me, and nobody else in the world; she told me so one day—one day when I was naughty, and she was trying to make me good."

Effie was old enough, and enough spoiled by hearing too much of her worldly mother's conversation with like-minded friends, to have a dash of mischievous wickedness mingling with her childish simplicity; and

now she pushed her face close up to Lily's, and whispered:

"Why did you leave me and go to him, when you loved me and didn't love him?" with a nod towards Mr. Elphinstone. "Was it because this is so much nicer than our school-room?"

"No, no, child—no. You must not say such things. You are talking of what you cannot understand."

As Lily answered thus, her heart beat with great bounds against the clinging child, and her arm tightened round her convulsively. She looked at her husband, dreading to see signs that he had heard. Then she joined in the conversation about places in Italy and the south of France, where she and Mr. Elphinstone had wintered.

Mrs. Maston had not thought that it would prove pleasant or convenient to be on hostile terms with the Elphinstones, so before Lily returned, she addressed to her a long letter of explanation, congratulation,

and self-justification. Bringing Effie with her to-day had been her final attempt to secure for herself a good reception.

"What was the matter with you, Lily?" her husband asked, when Mrs. Maston and Effie had left. "I am not obliged to you if you think me such a jealous fool that I cannot bear to see you fondle a child; but you behaved as if you did think so."

Lily's eyes wandered about the room, with the restless, imploring look of one seeking help, and finding none. Was she seeking a way out of the labyrinth of misery? Then she came and stood before her husband, in that shrinking, helpless attitude, to see which especially pained and annoyed him.

"I do not know what to do, where to turn for advice," she said. "You are my husband—can you be my friend too? What are we to do? Things grow worse, and I am afraid—afraid of what lies before us. I study to serve you, to satisfy you. I

have not a thought, which has anything to do with this present world, which is not yours. Yet I know, I see, I feel, that I pain you, wound you, torture you. Ralph, what shall we do? It is so miserable. What shall we do? What shall I do?"

He bent his face down to hers, and said,

"What you must do is soon told. You talk of duty, and omit the one thing needful. You talk of submission, and keep an obstinate heart. What you must do is soon told—you must love me!"

She lifted her eyes to his. The truth flew forth from them against him. It was no new truth to him, yet it bruised him afresh, and made him recoil. As if the eyes had not spoken plainly enough, her lips parted, and the words, "I do not love you—I do not love you; I cannot—cannot—cannot love you," rushed from between them.

When they were spoken, she caught in her breath, as if trying to recapture the

escaped sounds, and wrung her hands, and cried—

"It was not I—it was some demon in me spoke. Forgive me, Ralph—oh, Ralph, forgive me!"

She ran from the room, down the garden, and through the park, and into the copse, near the wood; there she sank down in the ferns, and lay hidden. He followed her, and found her, and, by-and-by, as the first dinner-bell rang, the servants saw their master and mistress saunter up the garden arm-in-arm. He had been in an agony lest, by one of the gardeners, or by anyone about the place, his wife's wild flight had been observed; but it happened to be the workmen's dinner-hour, and the grounds were deserted. Perhaps one of the most stinging of the perpetual irritations which made things worse and worse for both of them, as time went on, was that caused by the ceaseless effort to keep up appearances. Mr. Elphinstone was a proud man; he would

not have his misery suspected, could it have been lessened by half through being known, and Lily after that day was aware of this. After that day, she literally strained and warped her candid nature, accepting it as part of her "duty" to act what she did not feel; trying each day to act well through that day the lie of her life—to act the part of a wife who loved her husband. Of course, there were times when nature re-acted from this great strain; in future she tried at such times to shut herself up away from everybody—most of all away from her husband, lest she should be impelled to tell him, not only that she did not love, but that she hated him—which she did not (it was not in her nature to hate), save when she was almost mad that she could not love him; but that she should soon do so was one of the dreads of her life.

After the outbreak of that June day, everything went on as before; no new truth had been heard or told. Perhaps, for a

time, things were a little better than before. Lily, torn by remorse and full of self-reproach, redoubled her efforts at self-control —her efforts by no word or deed or look to pain him.

CHAPTER V.

THE second Winter of their married life Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone did not go abroad. In the following Spring, very early—it was before the snowdrops were out of bloom, for the grave was for many days strewn with them—there was a small new mound in the churchyard—the pretty, quiet churchyard, one gate of which opened from the park.

Poor Lily's life seemed to be a deepening pool of darkening anguish. In her husband's presence she gasped back all the tears that should have lost their bitterest of bitterness being shed upon his breast, and which, repressed, settled round her heart, to grow stagnant and poisonous.

He had not rejoiced with her in her half-delirious brief joy, and had not grieved with her in her grief, she thought. Shuddering and sighing, she said to herself, "I shall hate him by-and-by. I am going down that road, and I do not know how to stop."

Why could not Lily learn to love her husband? He was a man most men admired—a man more than one woman had loved for himself, not as Mrs. Maston had done, for his position. Why could not Lily learn to love him? Do you think she did not ask herself that question with self-torturing persistence, trying to wring the reason out of her soul? Do you think she did not set her poor little will, all of herself she had power over, towards her "duty?" Poor soul! striving to learn love through duty, instead of knowing duty through love! Life's alphabet may not, I think, be learned backward in that fashion. At least, Lily could not so learn it, and she had no theo-

ries to stand in her way; she tried simply and sincerely.

In Lily Winters, though she had not recognised this formerly, the spring of inner delight had never quite dried up; through the dreariest and saddest years of her life, "time to remember" had been the luxury and poetry of dull days. This "remembering" meant for her no vague and pale representation, but a vivid re-forming and living again of some scenes of her early and brief happiness. For Lily Elphinstone such "remembering" was agony, because she believed it to be sin.

Ah! Lily was far more miserable than formerly. All she suffered she suffered doubly now; for herself and for her husband. The misery of her misery, without which she thought all would be as nothing, was the consciousness of how she was a daily torture, than which nothing could be more exquisite, to him. Whether or no there was morbid exaggeration of the truth

in this consciousness, there it was; and over the dreary life she had lived in poverty and desolation, there seemed to her, when she now looked back upon it, to hover an atmosphere of peace and holiness.

Are there any with whom the daily companionship, the forced nearness of an inharmonious nature, an unloved being, will, at length, induce harmony—create love? If so, let them tell how Lily might have learnt to love her husband. And what was the truth regarding him? Was it only in the mirror of Lily's mind that his misery was to be read? Was he learning to be content with the lot he had chosen, with a wife who did not love him?

As yet it seemed as if the knowledge that the reality of the thing he craved was not his, made him the more greedy of the semblance. He had become morose, jealous, exacting—hardly suffering her out of his sight. He was doubly thwarted. Not only his heart was wounded, but his will was re-

sisted; and to have his will resisted by a creature so frail-seeming that sometimes he felt as if a breath of his might blow out its life—by a creature so near that in no way could he disentangle it from his heartstrings—to be mocked, as he called it, by the shadow of what he asked for—to have duty, submission, obedience, freely given, and only love denied—to ask for bread and be given a stone—from all this, which he felt to be intolerable, he yet found no escape.

Lily's eyes—the eyes he watched so ceaselessly—were learning to have but two expressions for him. The one defied him, saying no more, "I *do* not," but "I *will* not love you." The other was such a look as you may see in the eyes of a gentle, intelligent and high-bred dog, suddenly subjected to a course of unwonted and unmerited harsh usage—an exquisitely painful look to see even in the eyes of a dog.

Not that Lily's husband ever lifted his hand against her. Good heavens, no! But

had not his eyes and his tongue scourged her, lacerated her, cowed her?

After the great trial of the birth and loss of her baby, Lily never got up her strength. After that she never had the slightest look of even physical well-being. The mind told upon the body, the body upon the mind—a constant and fatal reaction.

All the Summer she was ailing: when the Autumn came, the doctor advised that she should Winter in the South. Then Lily showed an obstinacy of self-will that perplexed her husband. She would not go. It was the first dereliction from outward wifely duty and submission, and it amazed him. He had to yield. He brooded over this till the real reason suggested itself to him. Lily clung to the neighbourhood of her buried darling. He watched her, and found there was no evening, rain, or snow, or hail, dusk or dark, on which she did not go to bid her baby good-night. Generally, she sat awhile, quiet and tearless, by the

little mound, her mind evidently not resting in or on that grave, but following her "little one" to the place her religion and her imagination combined gave it, among God's "little ones." Now and then, however, she would be mastered by a heart-bursting passion of anguish, and would throw herself upon the mound, her breast pressed against the turf, her arms beating the ground on either side, crying, with half-stifled cries —"Oh! baby, make room for me; make room for me. Let me get through to you—let me get through." Having once stood by, unseen and unsuspected, when it was thus with her, her husband had felt that to do so again, to live through such another half-hour, was as much as his reason was worth.

And Lily thought he did not suffer with her!—that he had not rejoiced with her or grieved with her; and when forced to name the child at all, she would jealously call it not "ours," but "mine."

Poor Lily! this present misery of hers, which she felt to be self-incurred—for had she not done evil that good might come?—was teaching her to be ungentle and unjust.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE night—it was early Spring again, but the weather was bleak and bitter, a black March—Lily came back from the churchyard whiter than ever, and quivering in every nerve; while in her eyes was a wild visionary look. She did everything in the usual order, however, stealing upstairs with her usual quietness to put her hood and cloak away. Then going into the drawing-room, she rang for the urn, made the tea, and sat waiting for her husband, whom when she went out she had left in the dining-room, sitting over his wine—sitting with the wine before him, rather; it was little he ever drank.

Lily was one of those women who can pay

a sort of mechanical attention to the smallest things when the greatest ones occupy them. Sometimes her husband taunted her with the care she took of his physical comforts, while she starved and tormented his soul. Finding that Mr. Elphistone did not join her, and fearing the tea would be cold, she went to look for him.

She found him in her own morning room, seated at her writing-table, a manuscript book open before him. There was nothing strange in his being there; he often chose to write his letters at her desk.

"Nothing in that is new," she said, hurriedly, going up to him, when she saw what it was that occupied him. "I found it accidentally to-day. Indeed, I did not know that I had kept it. There is nothing written there that is so much of the truth as you know. Why should you pain yourself needlessly?"

She put her hand on the book to take it from him, but he pushed her hand away.

"When you found it why did you not directly burn it?" he asked, sternly. "Let me remind you of its contents; then you shall judge if it should be in Mrs. Elphinstone's possession."

"Spare me," Lily said, putting her hands to her head. "To-night, of all nights, spare me! To-night, of all nights, I cannot bear to be reminded of what those poor lines stood for!"

He thrust the book into his breast-pocket, but without having looked at his wife, or he must have been struck by the expression of her face. Putting his hand upon her shoulder, he said, affecting to yawn, as he spoke,—"Come and give me my tea. I am tired, and you are shaking—with cold, is it? Come!"

She took his arm as she was expected to do.

He felt her feebleness in the way she clung to him; suddenly he stopped, and turned her to the light. There was a strange

concentration of intense and conflicting feeling in his face and tone, as he said,—

"Poor bird! There are no prison-bars will hold you in and back much longer, I fancy."

All that evening Lily continued to shiver and tremble perceptibly; often she furtively glanced round the room—once, at some slight, unexpected noise, she started up and screamed.

She answered to her husband's questions —"I have no control at all over myself to-night; I feel as if I had escaped from my own hold. Perhaps I shall be better in the morning, if I can sleep. But there is something I must tell you now, to-night." She paused, and gasped.

"I am listening to you, Lily," he said, in such a tone of tender pity as she had not heard from him for very long.

"Do not speak like that—speak harshly, as you have often done of late." She used a sharp intonation of entreaty. "No won-

der—the wonder is how you have been so good to me. Oh, Ralph, if I could spare you this! If I had been a stronger woman, I might have spared you so much. But I cannot keep this in: if I try, my heart or my brain will burst to let it through."

"Do not try—speak, poor child, tell me this new trouble, then go to rest." He could now have found it in his heart to pray that her rest might not again, in this world, be broken.

"After all," Lily resumed, "I do not see that it makes any difference. It is better you should know, and better you should know from me; but I do not see that it makes any difference. *He is not dead.*" She sunk her voice to a whisper. "I have seen him to-night. Do not look like that! Why should you mind? It makes no difference —not even to him. If he had been dead he would have known all the same. To you it can make no difference—all you ever had of me you will have still while I am alive.

You knew quite well that I did not love you, and that I went on loving him—so you see it makes no difference; but it was my duty to tell you—was it not? I try to do my duty, Ralph, indeed I do; I often fail miserably, especially since—since my baby died; but I have tried, and I will try. Of course I was shocked and startled, and could not, at first, so plainly see that it made no difference—but I shall be better in the morning."

Was it truth, or the fancy of a sick brain? What could it matter to the miserable man? But he tried to discover: it seemed to him that it mattered much.

"You have *seen* him to-night, you say, Lily—is that all? Did he speak? Did you speak?"

"No. I was in the churchyard, sitting by baby's grave. I always go to bid her good-night. You did not know it, but I always do. I tried for you not to know it—for fear——"

"For fear of what?"

"That you should forbid me, and I should be driven to the wickedness of disobeying you."

"You were sitting by our baby's grave—go on."

"I was sitting by my baby's grave when he passed outside in the lane. I felt him before I saw him. As he passed he looked over the wall, and I saw his face through the branches of the yew-tree. The wall is low, and he is tall, you remember. His face looked white through the dark branches; but it was his face—no mere spirit. But do not mind, Ralph; you see it makes no difference—at least"—she paused, and put her hand upon her heart, then added, speaking with difficulty—"at least, I *think* it does not; but to-morrow, when I have had some rest, I shall know better. I think I shall know a great deal more to-morrow. Good-night, Ralph."

It was strange. Mr. Elphinstone had

not believed this could be possible, yet now, with no proof, he believed it true. It was not till later, when he had reflected, that doubt arose. A groan from her husband—a sound of unutterable anguish—brought Lily back to him as she was leaving the room—not to touch him, or with any caressing words try to comfort him, as a wife who had learned to love him might have done, but just to stand before him, leaning heavily for support on the thing nearest her, and wait.

"What is it, Ralph?" she asked, after a time. "To you, at least, it makes no difference, and I—I cannot suffer more."

"To me it makes the difference between heaven and hell," he groaned. "I did not think my lot too blessed before—but now —— Oh, woman, whom I dare not call wife, forgive me! You have felt little of my love but its cruelty—have known nothing of my suffering but its savageness. I took your life into my keeping, and I have

bruised and maimed it. You said—I don't know when, the time seems long since—that I did not know of your nightly visit to the child's grave; I have followed you and watched over you till I felt my heart being torn fibre from fibre, and my reason plucked up by the roots through witnessing your anguish—your irremediable anguish."

"Oh, Ralph!"

She knelt before him now, clinging to his knees.

"Suffered!—what have I not suffered? I have suffered, as I have sinned, for us both. I was passive, for I saw no help. No help?—I see help now—I will seize it for you—you shall be free."

"Yes, Ralph," she said, faintly; "very soon. I feel that I shall soon be free." She was too weak and faint, too wearily senseless to grasp the meaning of his words.

"Go and rest now till the morning," he said, lifting her up. "Rest till the morning —see what that brings you."

She kissed his hand with a cold and timid kiss, and murmured—

"May God have pity upon us. I think He will, for we have pity upon one another."

Then she left him. Sunk in thought, he did not see with what weak and wavering steps she crossed the room.

He remained just in the attitude in which she left him, for perhaps an hour, then suddenly he sprang up.

"I must *know* first," he said; "not leave her doubly desolate with a legacy of horror."

He ordered his horse, inventing, for the benefit of his servants, some specious pretext for riding at once, late as it was, to the town. At midnight he returned; the house was then closed, and the servants went to bed. He shut himself into his study; there he remained some hours, writing and looking over papers. When he had finished he enclosed his private keys in a sealed packet, which he addressed to his wife. This packet, with some letters, one of which was also to

her, he placed conspicuously on the centre table. All this done, he fumbled for something in a drawer, found it, and hid it in his breast. Doing that, he felt the little book still hidden there. He drew it forth, and looked towards the fire, but that had been out for hours. He thought a moment.

"It is *his*," he said. "It should go with her." Of this, too, he then made a sealed packet, which he addressed as one of the letters was addressed.

Afterwards, he looked round the room with a long, comprehending look. Then he bared and bent his head. "God have mercy upon my soul, and make her happy," is what he would have said. Perhaps he did *say* it, but he could not *pray* it. What did he care for his miserable self, soul or body. He went to the window and opened it, letting in the chill and ghastly dawn. He had one foot on the terrace outside, one still within the room: one hand clasped that thing hidden in his breast, while the other

held back the shuttered window, when he felt something pass before his face. It was with him as with one of old—fear and trembling came upon him, the hair on his head lifted itself up, and the blood about his heart stood still. He saw nothing, heard nothing with his outward ears, he only *felt*. Was it a chill breath blown from the dawn? Nothing near him had been stirred. Great awe was upon him. He stepped back into the room; he was now impelled to see her once again before—— Afterwards? He did not know—the resolute will had suddenly melted within him; he felt weak and feeble as a child.

"Once again—yes; I will see her once again."

He stole up the stairs and along the gallery to the door of his wife's room. As he opened it, an icy cold wind blew on his face; the lattices of one window were pushed open wide. The gust blew out the flar-

ing candles, which till then had been burning on the table.

The grey light of the dawn fell full on Lily's face. She lay on the bed, dressed as when she left him, her attitude that in which one flings oneself down in intense weariness; she had not moved since she threw herself down there, the bed showed no signs of any tossing or struggling. He bent over her, lower, lower; presently his cheek touched hers: his hand left its hiding-place—something clashed down upon the ground; he heeded that no more than she did—no more than the dead did. He raised himself to look at her again. After a long gaze he said aloud —"Free—at last—thank God!" The sound of his own voice stirred him; he knelt beside her, and wept like a child or a woman: yet no, no whit like either, but like a strong man, whose will is broken; and his heart melted within him.

There are lives that wear out the hearts that live them with their weariness, till, for

very tiredness, the sufferer goes to the grave as happier human creatures to the night's rest. Lily had been subject to long and deadly swoonings; this was the longest and deadliest, and the last.

When he had laid his wife to her rest, Mr. Elphinstone recognized that he had parted with her eternally. What, in any other state of being, had he to do with a woman whose eyes, lips, and life had voluntarily and involuntarily said, "I do not love you?"

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